

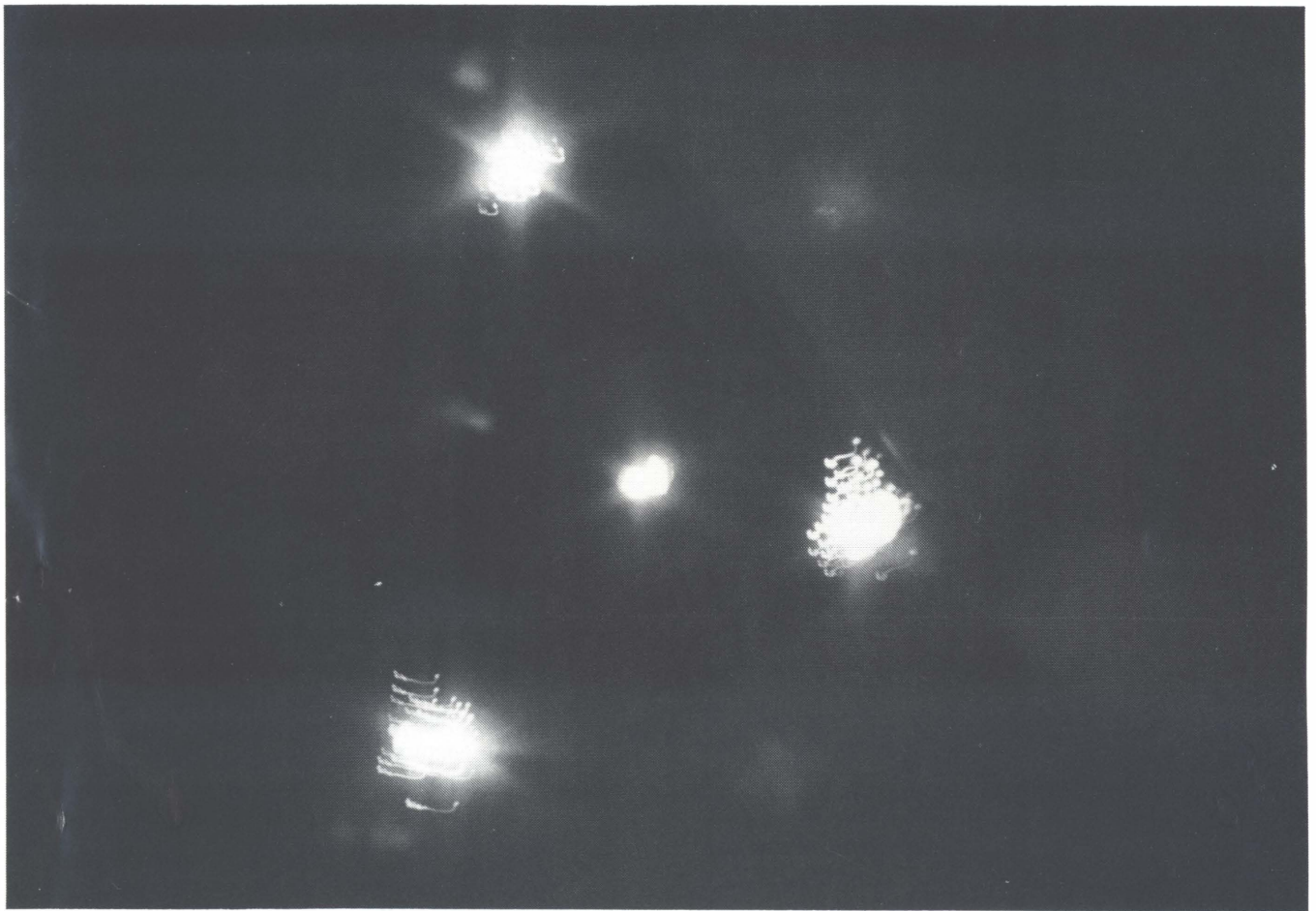
**The
New**

Ufologist

Number 6

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Petit-Rechain Photo Explained ?



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The BELGIUM WAVE. ... The Bonnybridge Phenomenon ... Operation Flying Triangle. ... UFOlogists win Televised debate. ... Ufology - Live In Lytham ... Please Turn Off The Lights When You Leave ... and lots more !!!

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Editorial Address :-

The New UFOlogist,
293 Devonshire Road,
BLACKPOOL,
FY2 0TW,
England.

Subscriptions Address :-

3, Selborne Court,
Tavistock Close,
ROMSEY,
Hampshire
SO51 7TY

You can also contact The New
UFOlogist via E-mail at :-

100611.1013@compuserve.com

Editorial Panel :-

Joe Dormer.
Paul Fuller.
Rodney Howarth.
Jenny Randles.

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Editorial

Welcome to issue 6 of *The New UFOlogist*. Once again we have faced considerable problems in putting this issue together. Unfortunately three quarters of our Editorial Board have suffered significant life events in recent months which have prevented us from making our usual contribution to UFO research. However, we do hope to be able to continue producing this magazine on a more regular and reliable basis in the near future.

We begin this issue with a first class analysis of the famous wave of Belgium 'triangles'. Wim Van Utrecht's sceptical but thoroughly researched article suggests that these well-documented events are a classic example of how UFO waves are triggered by social forces which concentrate them into small geographical areas. Van Utrecht suggests that 'cultural factors' and 'the location of UFO investigators' were major forces in the shaping of the UFO reporting process (as they were at Warminster, during the 1960s, for example). By drawing attention to the special relationship which exists between researchers and their witnesses Van Utrecht demonstrates how difficult it can be for investigators to investigate phenomena which they themselves appear to trigger.

One of the more controversial aspects of this paper is Van Utrecht's claim that the major radar-visual case which took place over Belgium on the night of March 30-31st 1990 can be explained by a combination of anomalous reflections of radar waves from ground-based objects and coincidental misperceptions of normal astronomical phenomena. If this synopsis is correct it suggests that despite mankind's rapid technological advances and the involvement of highly-trained military observers it is still possible to construct a classic high-strangeness UFO case from unrelated prosaic events.

UFOlogists have always had a love affair with photographic cases. On our front cover we have reproduced Van Utrecht's attempt to replicate the famous Petit-Rechain photograph. This attempt appears to cast considerable doubt on what was hitherto considered to be strong positive evidence of the physical reality of the famous triangles. It is indeed ironic that whilst many sceptics have claimed that the Belgium wave represented advanced Stealth-like objects Van Utrecht has found a simpler

explanation. However, it remains to be seen if his conclusions will attract support from other researchers.

If Van Utrecht is right, we could be forgiven for concluding that the great Belgium wave was nothing more than a *sociological* phenomenon which was triggered by a gross misperception of the planet Venus and which grew and grew, fed by eager UFOlogists and the media, but which eventually starved due to the lack of hard incontrovertible physical evidence.

This work raises an important issue. If a UFO wave as great as the great Belgium wave has no more physical basis than a mass of misperceptions and a prominent hoax, can we interpret *any* UFO wave as having any greater substance than this ?

We follow this with Ron Halliday's careful study of the Bonnybridge phenomenon, a case which did more to place this unremarkable Scottish town in the public consciousness than it did to further UFOlogy's already battered profile. Halliday demonstrates that in some respects Bonnybridge exhibited strong parallels with the Belgium wave in terms of its narrow geographical and sociological confines. Halliday suggests that the presence of respected media figures (plus UFOlogists !) and a newspaper circulation war helped to concentrate public attention on what were relatively mundane sightings. This radical perspective raises serious questions about how UFO waves begin and grow.

At our invitation BUFORA's Malcolm Robinson responds to Halliday's article and begins by agreeing that the media had a field day with Bonnybridge, operating a duplituous role by attracting further witnesses but knocking them down again when the occasion fitted. Above all Robinson agrees that the number of reported sightings was grossly exaggerated despite his attempts to set the record straight. However, Robinson disagrees that there is nothing left to study at Bonnybridge and maintains that not all the UFO reports he investigated were so readily explicable.

Victor Kean follows with an expert piece of data collection on reports of flying triangles. His work shows how UFO groups should co-operate and exchange data in an attempt to find potential explanations for UFO reports. It is also instructive to see that flying triangles are not necessarily a recent

development - and by implication not necessarily a new cultural stereotype - because some of the reports Kean and his collaborators have uncovered date back to the 1950s. Does this mean that Van Utrecht's conclusions need refining ?

Malcolm Robinson follows with a contentious article describing a televised UFO court case, in which the very reality of UFOs was put on trial. As a promoter of a belief in the reality of UFOs Robinson understandably takes great pride in persuading the majority on a selected jury to accept that UFOs are 'a reality' in the light of much professional scepticism. Robinson claims that this was a great victory for UFOlogists which marked a turning point for the subject. Steuart Campbell, who was the main sceptical spokesperson on this programme, responds with some important balancing comments.

Finally Andy Roberts portrays an insiders' view of the Lytham St. Annes UFO Conference organised by the LAPIS group last November, whilst Peter Rendall reminds us all of the demise of the plasma-vortex explanation for crop circles and the questions this raises in our search for explanations.

There's plenty of UFOs in this issue and we hope that the many shades of opinion and evidence are presented in a balanced and constructive manner. But - if you disagree - or think we've made a mistake somewhere along the line - please write in and have your say.

Paul Fuller

Acknowledgement

The following article appears in an excellent new book *UFOs 1947-1997*, which is edited by Hilary Evans and Dennis Stacy, and which has been published by John Brown Publishing Ltd (ISBN 1-870870-999), price £ 16.99. It is republished here with grateful thanks to *Fortean Times* from your Editorial Team.

According to the Evans and Stacy : "The small country of Belgium was the scene, in 1989-1990, of one of the greatest clusters of UFO sightings ever chronicled. But it was not only the number of sightings that was impressive: it was the consistency of the reports, which seemed strong evidence of UFO

activity of a very specific kind - huge, black triangular-shaped forms, moving slowly through the Belgium airspace, challenging any logical explanation.

The wave was also characterised by an unusual degree of co-operation between the authorities and Belgium's major UFO organisation, SOBEPS (Société Belge D'Etude Des Phénomènes Spatiaux), a widely-respected group founded in 1971 whose journal *Infospace* has made an outstanding contribution to the UFO debate. The two volumes relating to the wave published by SOBEPS, though in hindsight they can be seen as somewhat critical in their acceptance of evidence and premature in their judgements, remain monuments of dedicated research, testifying to the diligence and enthusiasm of the Belgium investigators.

Wim Van Utrecht is a long-time and widely-respected researcher who heads the Caelestia Project. His 1994 analysis (with Frits Van der Veldt) of the 1975 Zwischbergen photograph is arguably the finest case study in the UFO literature. He can be reached at Kronenburgstraat 110, B-2000, Antwerpen, Belgium."

The BELGIUM WAVE A three-cornered affair by Wim Van Utrecht

Prelude

For nearly a decade all had been quiet on the European front until, on October 9, 1989, the Soviet press bureau TASS launched the story of a UFO landing in a park in Voronezh, 500 km southeast of Moscow. According to the press report, a couple of three-eyed giants and a mechanical dwarf had emerged from the landed craft and fired some sort of lasergun at a boy, rendering the child temporarily invisible. Details of the story were published in newspapers all over the globe [and featured on BBC TV's *Newsnight*. Editor], probably not so much because the editors regarded the bizarre tale as proof of an alien act of aggression, but because the publication of this UFO story in the Soviet's leading paper PRAVDA illustrated the political changes that were becoming effective in the former U.S.S.R. since the beginning of GORBATSJOV's *Perestrojka*.

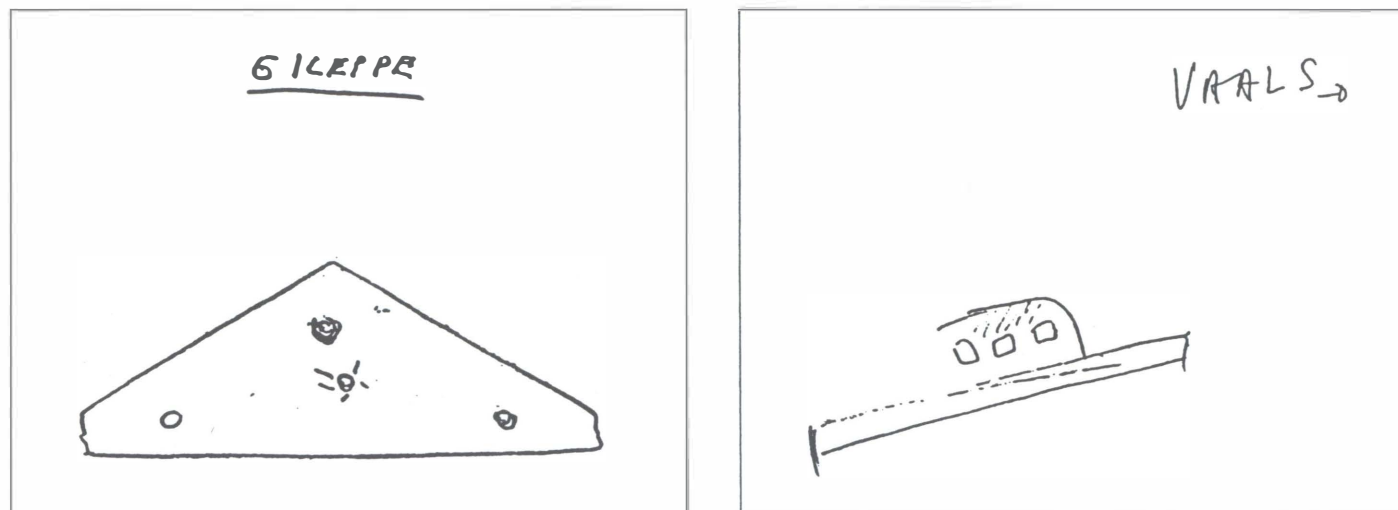


Fig 1: Two early sketches of "the Belgium triangle", drawn by one of the gendarmes who spotted the "craft" over Eupen on November 29, 1989 (the place names that figure at the top refer to the locations where the object was assumed to be heading).

The story of the Veronezh landing was the first UFO news to hit the papers of Western Europe for a long time. Over the weekend of November 25-26, alarmed citizens from the Dutch speaking part of Belgium reported seeing a luminous disc circling their homes. It later transpired that the sightings had been caused by a light-show from a discotheque at Halen, a small community in the province of Limbourg. The owner of the disco had tried to attract youngsters to his business by projecting a rotating xenon lamp onto the cloud-deck. Despite the fact that the culprit had been identified, the disco's light-show continued to cause UFOs to be reported in the area until, on December 16, when the Public Prosecutor's Office ordered the disco manager to switch off his installation after the Belgium Air Force had sent two F-16 aircraft to the area to identify the 'mysterious discs'.

The Coming of the Triangles

Four days after the reports had started to trickle in from Limbourg, and only 70 km southeast from Halen, another UFO incident occurred. This time the events were to create waves far beyond the borders of the small Belgium state. On November 29, 1989, two

members of the Eupen gendarmerie - we are now in the German speaking part of the country - had the experience of their lifetime. At exactly 5.24 that evening, as they were driving their patrol car from Eupen to Kettenis (province of Liège), the two gendarmes spotted a bright light over one of the fields that bordered the road. When they noticed that the light followed a straight course parallel to their car, the gendarmes quickly drove onto a point that would have taken them underneath the light's predicted trajectory. However, as the unidentified light flew over the puzzled witnesses, it stopped, made a full turn and then left in the opposite direction. The two men could now discern a 'dark solid mass in the shape of an isosceles triangle'. Underneath there were three blinding white lights, one in each corner. A pulsating red light glowed in the centre. The two law enforcers decided to follow the strange craft which was now heading back towards Eupen. In the village they paid a quick visit to their headquarters and rang the nearest airfield and a nearby military base. They were told that there was no air traffic or military activity in the region that could account for the sightings.

At about 6.15 p.m. the two witnesses returned to the

patrol car and decided to head for a place which they were sure would offer a panoramic view over the area and the nearby lake of Gileppe. Upon arrival they recovered sight of the object. It now seemed to be hovering motionless directly over the watchtower of the lake. In an early interview, one of the witnesses said that, at this time, they 'had the unclear impression that, ever now and then, there were beams of light shooting out from the sides' ¹. In later interviews though, the witnesses were quoted as having described 'a stationary white ball which repeatedly, but always simultaneously, emitted two clearly visible but very thin beams of a reddish light in opposite directions'. The latter source also speaks of 'small fire balls that appeared at the extremities of the beams, detached themselves and returned to the object after having circled the white ball a few times' ². While observing this unusual display, a series of lights emerged from behind a nearby row of trees. Behind the lights the gendarmes distinguished the dark greenish silhouette of a triangle that rose into the air and executed a sharp turn. During this manoeuvre an upper structure could be seen with what appeared to be illuminated windows, 'similar to a train wagon lit from the inside'. The object then followed a spiral-shaped trajectory before taking off in the direction of the German border. It was exactly 8.39 p.m. when it disappeared from view.

Throughout the incident, which had lasted a full three hours, the witnesses had stayed in constant contact with their headquarters in Eupen. Much to their relief, the dispatch officer informed them that he too had seen the object and that additional sightings were being reported by patrols in nearby communities. One colleague, patrolling the area northwest of Eupen, confirmed that he had seen not only an object carrying three blinding white lights and a pulsating red light, but that he had also noticed 'something at the back of the craft that was turning round, like a turbine'. Other witnesses - some 150 eyewitness accounts were gathered for that night - mentioned a distinct sound that reminded them of a ventilator ³. Researchers who are distrustful of an extraterrestrial interpretation of UFO reports, emphasize that these descriptions fit those of an ultra light motorized aircraft or a blimp. They further point to the fact that three white lights and a red flashing light are consistent with the standard lighting configurations for aircraft. During the hours that preceded the event, several independent witnesses had spotted an oval- or cigar-

shaped object travelling slowly over the region just south of the lake of Gileppe. These sightings occurred in broad daylight. Is it possible that the unidentified object that crossed the Eupen sky after dark was actually a blimp, but that it was described as a triangle merely because of the position of the three 'corner lights'?

It was only in 1996 when independent researcher Paul Vanbrabant discovered that, on the evening of November 29, Venus had been in the same area of the sky as the 'white ball of light' that the gendarmes had spotted over the watchtower of the lake of Gileppe ⁴. Also compatible with an astronomical explanation is that the light had remained motionless for nearly an hour before it grew weaker and finally disappeared. Verification by the author revealed that Venus had reached its maximum magnitude that day and was only six degrees above the horizon. The planet's azimuth also closely matched that of the presumed UFO (taking into account an error margin of maximum 15°, i.e. the part of the sky that can be covered by spreading your hand at arm's length). Moreover, the sky was crystal clear that evening and the witnesses had not mentioned seeing a second bright light in close proximity to the UFO. These circumstances make it very plausible that Venus was indeed responsible for this phase of the sighting. The 'unclear impression of beams of light shooting out from the sides' may be due to well-known atmospheric effects that occur when light sources are observed low on the horizon. If the Venus interpretation is correct, it implies that there is no longer a reason to believe that there was more than one unidentified object in the sky that evening.

SOBEPS comes into play

The next day the story of the 'Eupen triangle' was highlighted on various Belgium television stations and on December 1st, Michael BOUGARD, president of SOBEPS ⁵, visited Eupen to interview the two principle witnesses. Soon other investigators, most of them SOBEPS members, followed in BOUGARD's footsteps. In their search for additional witnesses a SOBEPS team not only installed itself in a local press bureau, but also went from door-to-door, asking people if they had seen something unusual in the sky the previous days. A praiseworthy reflex but one that also marked the beginning of the group's monopoly on the events that were to follow.

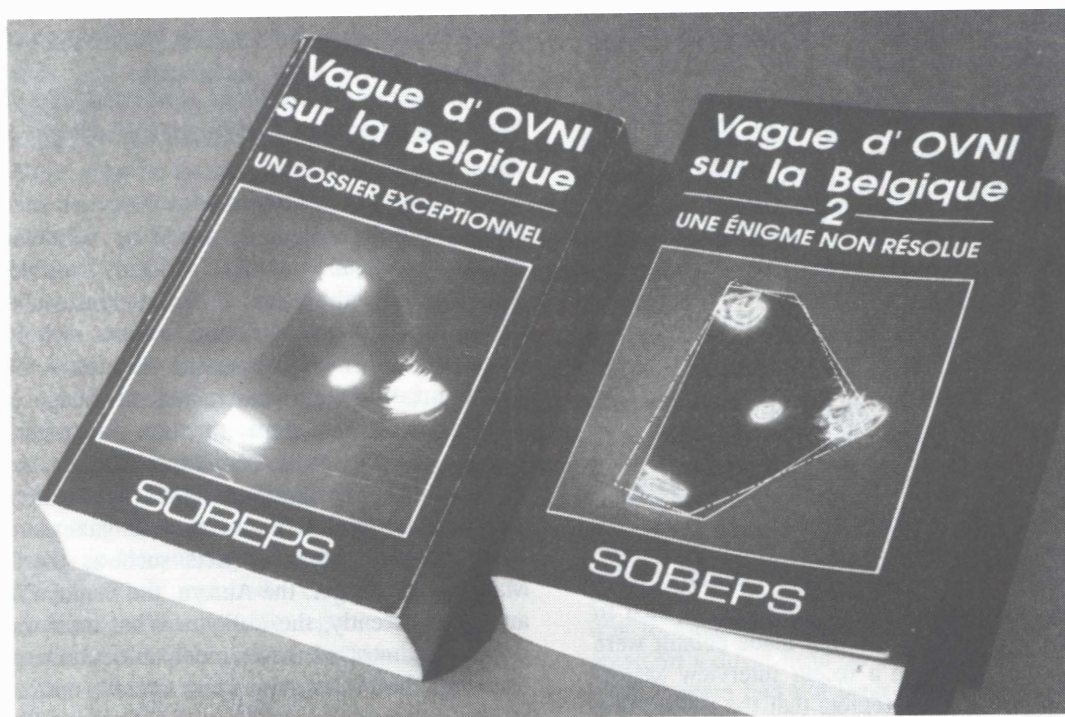


Fig 2: The two SOBEPS books on the Belgium wave with the Petit-Rechain slide on the cover.

December 11-12, 1989, was another memorable day for Belgium ufologists. That night numerous people in the regions around the cities of Liège and Namur were baffled by a mysterious illuminated contraption which sailed over their homes. The sightings came to a strange end when, shortly after 2 a.m., a man in Jupille-sur Meuse, awakened by a deep, pulsating sound, saw an egg-shaped object that seemed to have become stuck in a spruce-fir. The object carried three bright spotlights underneath and something that looked like a rudder at the back. It took a few seconds before the contraption managed to tear itself loose, after which it headed towards the witness, flew over his house and finally disappeared in the distance. Immediately thereafter, a bright vertical beam of light came on from behind the houses facing the witness. The next day both journalists, gendarmes and military people were seen searching the area. According to the witness, even a helicopter was employed. The description of the unknown object strongly suggests that some sort of motorized airship got into trouble that night. The beam of light may have been a search-light, possibly coming from someone guiding the airship from the ground. Only, no one ever came forward to claim responsibility for the flight ...

As UFO reports began pouring in for more than eighteen months, the popularity of SOBEPS increased at an equivalent pace. Interviews with members of the group were published in almost every newspaper and magazine in the country and UFOs had become a regular topic in talk-shows on television and radio. Usually the address and phone number of SOBEPS were given in case readers wanted to report a personal experience. In two years time, the group collected approximately 2,000 eye-witness accounts, many of which are tape-recorded telephone calls. During the years that preceded the UFO wave, SOBEPS had been struggling to keep its head above water. Now, in only a few days time, new life had been breathed into the organisation by attracting new volunteers who were prepared to go into the field and check as many reports as possible. Incredible as it may seem, SOBEPS succeeded in obtaining investigative reports on approximately 450 cases. Most of these cases are detailed in the group's journal and in two books, each about 500 pages thick. Sceptics point to the inevitable lack of training and experience of some of the new recruits resulting in ill-documented reports that cannot be used for proper scientific evaluation. Also severely criticised by the sceptics was SOBEPS's presupposed belief in an extraterrestrial origin for UFO sightings.

Investigators who are acquainted with the writings of leading SOBEPS members know that this is true, but the fact remains that this well-organized society, with its neatly arranged office in the country's capital, managed to earn respect from both ufologists and non-ufologists, including the Belgium Air Force. During the first weeks of the wave, the B.A.F. had been swamped with telephone calls and it was decided that SOBEPS was better placed to deal with this type of situation. It marked the beginning of a short but intense relationship which reached its peak during the Easter days of 1990. During this prolonged weekend of April 14-17 a Hawker Siddeley and a Brittan Norman reconnaissance airplane were put at stand-by during a skywatch organised by the group. The code-name of this historical collaboration was 'OPERATION IDENTIFICATION OVNI'. Many military men, civilians, investigators and newsmen participated in the initiative. The only ones that made default were the UFOs themselves. In a recent interview Major-General De BROUWER regrets that the B.A.F. was never given a political mandate nor official instructions to start an in-depth inquiry into the Belgium reports. This meant that the Airstaff had to deal with the situation within its own already chock-full agenda. The Major-General personally assured us that there exists no special UFO service within the Belgium Army⁶.

In March 1991 there was a final upsurge in the number of reports. Then sightings became rare, with the exception of disco lightshows that kept stirring the imagination all over Europe.

Political and socio-cultural aspects

On December 21, 1989, Belgium's former Minister of Defense, Guy COEME, prompted by an interpellation put to the Chambre of Representatives, made an official statement about the increasing number of UFO reports emanating from the Province of Liège. With regard to a possible military explanation, the Minister stated that the Army had no idea what the UFOs were, but that :

- *they were not AWACS-aeroplanes, because they are submitted to radar control when they fly over Belgium;*
- *they were not F-117A aeroplanes, as was confirmed by the General Staff of the US Air Force;*
- *they were not teleguided military machines,*

because they were not used during these particular weeks;

- they were not ultra light motorized aeroplanes, because they produce a different and specific sound (sic). ⁷

Usually official statements made by politicians or military people, are not taken seriously by ufologists. This time something was different : instead of the ufologists, it was now the sceptics who were screaming 'cover-up', suspecting that the Air Force was hiding the truth and taking advantage of the UFO excitement to draw attention away from test flights of state-of-the-art experimental aircraft, probably of US design. Soon UFO investigators and sceptics were scrutinizing aviation magazines for the latest news on black projects such as the Black Manta, the Avenger, the Aurora, the Senior Citizen, and more recently, the LoFlyte. What most sceptics forgot was most of these impalpable wonderplanes were supposed to be supersonic aircraft, not capable of hovering close to the ground as was described in the best-documented Belgium cases. Another question that remained was why such aircraft would fly over a densely populated region carrying blinding spotlights if they were executing covert military test flights. One thing was obvious though, namely that modern trends in aviation design were also prevailing in present-day UFO descriptions.

Because of the proportions the Belgium wave had taken on, the UFO subject was now being regarded as a serious problem at the highest levels. Throughout 1991-1993 the possibility of establishing a European Centre for UFO Reports was at the agenda at no less than ten meetings of the European Parliament. The idea for a co-ordinated UFO centre came from Belgium's vice-premier Elio DI RUPO. When still a Member of the European Parliament, DI RUPO had been impressed by the Belgium sightings but also by a major French UFO-incident which had occurred on November 5, 1990, and later turned out to have been caused by a spectacular re-entry of a Russian satellite. As a scientist of formation DI RUPO wanted clear answers, but in the end the British - always a little bit averse to European collaboration - crushed the dream of many a ufologist and emphasized that the Community's money could be spent in a better way.

Since the military insisted that they had no clue as to what was going on, and with no convincing

explanations coming from the scientific community, speculation and imagination were given free play and it did not take long before almost any bright light in the sky was labelled a UFO. In consequence, most UFO reports could easily be attributed to airplanes, helicopters and bright stars and planets.

Occasionally, UFOs were reported from neighbouring countries as well but the majority of the sightings occurred in an area about 200 kms long and 100 kms wide. Apart from the first series of reports, which came from the Dutch and German speaking area in the east of the country, almost all cases emanated from places that lie south of our country's major language border which divides Belgium into a southern, French-speaking area (Wallonia) and a northern, Dutch-speaking area (Flanders). When plotted on a map, the dissemination of the sighting reports indicate that the wave set off in the eastern part of the country, then shifted to Liège and finally to Brussels, the very city where SOBEPS had its headquarters. These peculiarities seem to illustrate that cultural factors and the home of UFO investigators have a major influence on the reporting process.

The flap had lasted 16 months but it had taken only a fortnight to swap the old-established image of the nuts-and-bolts flying saucer for a new type of UFO, one that pops up almost exclusively at night, looks like a dark angular structure and carries several bright lights. At times the phenomenon is accompanied by a panoply of luminous 'special effects'. Triangle- and boomerang-shaped UFOs have occasionally been reported in the past but began to dominate the international scene only in the later eighties. Anyone claiming to have encountered a domed metal saucer nowadays risks making even ufologists furrow their brows and it will take something of the size of the huge discs starring in 'Independence Day' to turn the clock back again. It is abundantly clear that not only ufologists themselves but also the press and the cultural structure of our country have played an important role in the way in which the wave developed. But what about those cases in which dozens of independent witnesses reported seeing something unusual in the sky, at the same time and in the same area? Can they be explained by socio-cultural phenomena alone? It is time to take a look at the physical evidence.

The radar evidence

On July 11, 1990, Lieutenant-Colonel Wilfried DE BROUWER (later promoted to Major-General, Deputy Chief of Airstaff, Plans, Operations and Personnel) held a remarkable press conference at the NATO headquarters in Evere, Brussels. In the presence of a considerable presscrowd Lieutenant-Colonel DE BROUWER acknowledged that something highly unusual had occurred on the night of March 30-31, 1990. On that date, several gendarmes, this time from a location just south of Brussels, had observed inexplicable lights in the sky. Most witnesses thought the lights were stationary, though some reported possible movements. At about the same time, a radar station had picked up a fast moving target. Immediately, two F-16 fighters were scrambled to identify the lights. One of the pilots was to videotape the radar screen while the other opted for a direct head up display. Unfortunately, the latter camera had not been adjusted for a nocturnal operation. Because of this the images turned out totally black. In consequence, the only evidence pertaining to the chase were the radar images recorded by the other F-16. At first sight these were quite spectacular already. There had been no less than 13 lock-ons on an unidentified target. Apparently one or more objects had crossed the F-16's path, executing the most uncanny manoeuvres. The Air Force had even prepared an 8 page report plus appendices about the incidents. For ufologists this was excellent proof that something strange was indeed occurring in our skies, even if the fast jumping and diving blips hardly matched the typical slow flight that most eye-witnesses had described till then. To the sceptical community such spooky radar images could only originate from a malfunction of the computer, a misinterpretation of the computer data or from a refraction of radar waves caused by atmospheric effects⁸. The sceptics also emphasized that the radar returns were not positively correlated with the radar trackings obtained from the ground-stations. I myself was told by an acquaintance of the pilots that, at no time during the scramble, had they witnessed anything unusual, nor had they ever been impressed by the freakish radar blips. In the end the sceptics were proved right: the lights that baffled the gendarmes were identified as bright stars and planets, while a military study of the radar tapes revealed that at least one of the lock-ons (but probably three) was due to the fact that the F-16's radar had mistakenly locked onto the other F-16 that

was taking part in the UFO chase. The remaining lock-ons were almost certainly caused by 'ground clutter', meaning that, due to refraction of light beams by inhomogeneities in the atmosphere, ordinary surface objects, such as cars, had appeared as airborne targets on the radar screens.

Major-General DE BROUWER, now regrets that the press conference took place well before all the data had been properly analysed⁶. He recalls having allowed a French reporter to photograph two sequences of the radar tape. Shortly thereafter the photos appeared in the very popular *French Match*. This brought the indignant Belgium media to exercise so much pressure that the Air Force was left with no other choice than to present a detailed account of what had happened. In the early stages of the wave, the Minister of Defence, GUY COEME, had stated that the entire affair had to be treated with total openness towards the public. Top officials of the Belgium Air Force, including Lieutenant-Colonel DE BROUWER and Chief of Staff General VAN HECKE, supported this view. However, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General CHARLIER, was not too happy with the way things were developing. To him UFOs were just a load of nonsense and there was a serious risk that military secrets would be leaked now that possible weaknesses in the country's radar system were being exposed in the international media.

The photographic evidence

One can understand that most SOBEPS members were over the moon when they heard about the incidents of March 30-31, especially when they also received word that, in the early hours of March 31, only minutes after the F-16's had returned to their base, a man from Brussels had captured the famous triangle on video. The images, which were shown on television in various countries, depict the now well-known configuration of three white lights and a central red flashing light. The truth is that this recording did not remain a mystery for long. After having endorsed the authenticity of the document, follow-up inquiries by SOBEPS revealed that the witness had filmed an ordinary airliner preparing to land at the airfield of Zaventem. I later learned that the man in question also claims to have encountered UFOs and 'space beings' on numerous occasions, both before and after he took his video.

The day after, on All Fool's Day 1990, an umpteenth skywatch organized by SOBEPS finally payed off as three group members had the privilege of witnessing a trapezium-shaped platform with rounded corners fly over their heads. The object was equipped with two sets of blending 'searchlights', flanked by smaller lights. Underneath there was a red glow. The only thing that could be heard was a humming sound which reminded the trio of a jet engine. Fortunately, SOBEPS' photographic expert was among the witnesses and four photographs were made. However, when the film returned from the photolab the skywatchers were in for a major disappointment : only four microscopic white dots could be distinguished on only one of the shots. Yet, the photographer had used a tripod, a 300 mm telelens, and a highly sensitive 1600 ASA film. Moreover, he had taken several pictures of aircraft lights just before the UFO had come into view and all of these had turned out right. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the position of the spots on the one successful photo is characteristic of the two headlights and the two wing-tip lights of an ordinary airplane. Is it possible that, as a result of the excitement of the moment, the UFO experts had been misled ? The General Secretary of SOBEPS, who was among the witnesses, admitted that "this day we were on the tiptoe of expectation" but their final conclusion was that infrared radiation from the unknown craft had erased the photographic image on the film.

As with any modern UFO flap, the investigators were confronted with dozens of videos and photographs, all of which depicted nothing more than a varying number of white lights. Most of these lights turned out to be aircraft lights and bright stars or planets. In one instance the reflection of sunlight in distant windows were taken for a low hovering UFO. Often the electronics of the videos fooled the witnesses. The autofocus system of the majority of camcorders cannot cope with bright points of light against a dark background. This usually results in large transparent blobs of light with strange indentations, which in reality are reflections of components within the optical system of the camera.

Only one document, a colour slide, proved more difficult to explain. It was also the only piece of evidence that actually revealed the presence of a triangular structure. The colour slide in question was taken in early April 1990 by a young man from Petit-Rechain, not far from the city of Liège. It depicts a black triangle silhouetted against a dark bluish

background. There are white lights in each corner and a fourth light, surrounded by a reddish aura, in the centre (the other lights also display an orange colouring but to a lesser extent). The photographer, who works as a fitter and is a member of a local photographic club, took his photograph using a Praktica BX20 equipped with a 200 mm telelens and a skylight filter.

SOBEPS investigators are convinced of the photographer's integrity and point to the unusual aspect of the white lights. These can best be described as clusters of smaller lights, each depicted as a small sinuous stripe with different directions for each cluster. A scientific consultant to the group suspects that these large fiery lights are actually plasma jets that are part of the object's propulsion system.

Sceptics point to the fact that the photographer's girlfriend, who also witnessed the phenomenon, claimed that she only noticed four small points of light, lost her interest, then looked up again and found that the object had apparently left with tremendous speed. The photographer on the other hand stated that he saw 'three white round lamps, placed on a triangular surface' with a red flashing light in the centre and that the object slowly disappeared behind a neighbour's house. With regard to the girl's testimony, the initial SOBEPS report stated that 'There is a succession of contradictions on very precise points'.⁹

Another report with the Petit-Rechain slide is that it shows no background details which allow verification of the object's actual size and distance. Moreover, the fact that the exact date remains unknown, means that astronomical and meteorological data cannot be verified. Information is also scarce where it concerns the rest of the slides on the 36 exposures film. The only thing we know is that the UFO slide was frame number 35 and that a second photograph was made of the object, but was subsequently thrown away 'because there is nothing on it'. The 'good' slide was kept in a drawer despite the fact that the media were paying a lot of attention to the events of March 30-31. It surfaced four months later after a journalist had convinced the witness that his slide could well constitute an important piece of evidence.

The slide was analysed by various experts and at

various institutions, including the Royal Military School in Brussels, but no judgement was passed with regard to its authenticity. None of these analyses offered any certainty about the origin or the true dimensions of the object in the slide. Attempts by the author to imitate the Petit-Rechain slide yielded an image comparable to what can be seen on the original slide. Yet no big money or outside help was acquired. I proceeded as follows : a small triangle was cut out from a piece of black card-board and glued onto a larger greyish blue card-board. With the help of a needle tiny holes were pierced in the corners of the triangle and in its centre. The entire construction was then placed in front of four spotlights and photographed. A deliberate shake of the grey blue cardboard created trails of light which, contrary to what one would expect, do not all display a similar aspect and are not running in the same direction for each cluster. The Royal Military School conducted a comparative analysis on both the imitation and the original photograph. This uncovered several differences which indicate that the lights on the original do not seem to be coming through pierced holes. Despite numerous suggestions on my behalf to use other materials and different techniques, no further attempts were made to come up with better imitations.

[Editor's note : Wim Van Utrecht's attempt to replicate the Petit-Rechain slide can be seen on our front cover.]

Other physical evidence

Old-time ufologists told me they are convinced that the Belgium UFOs were not 'the real thing'. To back up their claim they point to the low number of entity reports and daylight sightings. The same investigators are also suspicious about the absence of electromagnetic side effects, such as the stalling of car engines, compass-needles running mad and interference with radio and television sets, all of which they say were reported in 'genuine flaps' of the past.

Also markedly absent during the Belgium wave were reports of traces on the ground or in vegetation. Only four such cases were recorded for the 1989-1991 period (one year later the first crop circles popped up in Belgium). In one incident mention was made of twelve circular patches in grass with a colouring that was slightly different from the surrounding grass. No

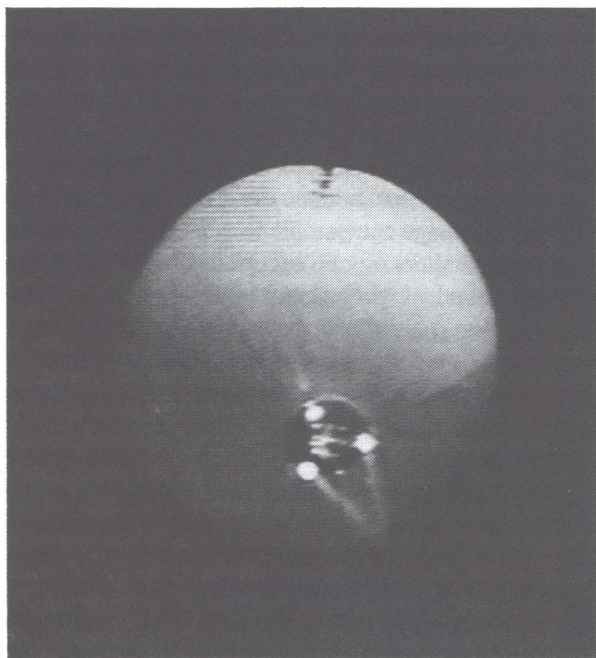


Fig 3 : Photograph of a small spherical balloon equipped with three bright spot-lights, as depicted in one of K's advertisement features.

mention was made of any unidentified objects or lights in the proximity of the field where they were discovered and it is likely that the patched areas were 'fairy rings' caused by fungi. A second report concerns a newspaper story about a cross-shaped impression in grass, but the paper gives no further details. In the two remaining cases, witnesses of a UFO incident spoke of strange traces but were the only ones to have seen the evidence. One witness even persisted in claiming that the traces were still clearly visible while none of the investigators and gendarmes who accompanied him noticed anything out of the ordinary.

State of affairs anno 1996

The Belgium wave has produced hundreds of fascinating eye-witness accounts but not a single piece of conclusive physical evidence. Yet, even researchers with a sceptical attitude towards the UFO phenomenon, will agree that trivial everyday phenomena cannot explain those incidents in which independent witnesses reported seeing a 'UFO' on the same day and within a well-defined area. Three such peak days stand out : November 29, 1989, December 11-12, 1989 and March 12, 1991. In addition there have been several isolated incidents,

some of them related in great detail by reliable observers, but unconfirmed by independent witnesses and with no joint characteristics that allow further analysis.

Surprisingly, the triangular shape, which is now common-place on covers of UFO magazines and in TV-commentaries, does not always prevail in the reports themselves. In those cases where a triangular structure was mentioned explicitly, it usually concerned a nocturnal experience. What remains is the description of a low flying dark object, estimated to be hovering no more than 150 metres above the ground, capable of changing its course abruptly, yet producing no downdraft but only the soft humming sound of a motor and carrying a lighting configuration attuned to standard safety regulations for aircraft. Yet, in spite of extensive inquiries in military and aviation circles, there is no trace of any experimental airplane, manned or unmanned, capable of such performances.

It seems that those in search of a down-to-earth explanation are left with two possibilities : an ultra light aeroplane or a motorized balloon. According to a rumour that circulates in aviation circles, an Air Force pilot, flying a home-built ULM without the permission of his superiors, was responsible for the November 29 sightings. Confirmation of this claim was never obtained. Since most witnesses described the phenomenon as 'huge', the ULM hypothesis also implies grotesque errors in the estimates of sizes and distances. So what are the chances of a motorized airship being flown over our country ? Do such 'zeppelins' equipped with bright spotlights exist ? Well they do, and the man who rents them - we will refer to him as 'K.' - lives in Brussels ...

In 1991 a SOBEPS investigator, who is also an airline pilot, started an inquiry in aviation circles. It led him to K., who initially admitted that his contraptions had indeed been responsible for the majority of the sightings. We were later told by Major General DE BROUWER that K. had even contacted the Air Force, offering them the solution for the Belgium UFO problem in exchange for a lot of money (an amount in the order of US \$ 1 million in mentioned). The proof constituted of an envelope containing all the dates and locations of the balloon flights. But what do these craft look like ? K's main invention is a teleguided steering mechanism for motorized balloons equipped with either a set of spotlights and/or a camcorder. These remote-

controlled *aerostats* are rented to add lustre to concerts, for advertising purposes or to videotape major indoor events from above. Flyers received from K. contain photographs of classical cigar-shaped airships equipped with a video camera and small spherical balloons carrying three spotlights. One of K.'s patent designs shows a traditional 'zeppelin' with a projector and a movie screen mounted under the hull, bringing to mind the numerous witness accounts of a giant rectangular object sailing the sky at low altitude. All this makes K. a good candidate to explain the Belgium UFO wave. Only, we could never find any proof of K's actual involvement. What is worse, is that K. now denies having ever flown his lighter-than-air outdoors.

Late 1996, independent researcher and investigator Jan VAN EETVELT and myself were given the opportunity to work out a detailed parliamentary question addressed to our present Minister of Defense, Mr. Jean-Pol PONCELET. The question, divided into five separate questions, focussed on incidents in which military involvement was reported. Major General DE BROUWER, now retired, kindly provided assistance and advised us on how we could best approach the Army. On December 17 the text was signed by Member of Parliament Jozef VAN EETVELT and tabled to the Chamber of Representatives. A written reply was received in April 1997. Unfortunately, it contained no information that could not already be found in the official documents which the Air Force had released to the press in the course of 1990-91. So it seems that, once again, it is up to the private investigator to solve an enigma which fascinated thousands, but was treated step-motherly, not only by the authorities of our country, but also by the scientific community.

Wim Van Utrecht.

Written in January/February 1997.
Amendments added June 1997.

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The Bonnybridge Phenomenon by Ron Halliday

Chairman of Scottish Earth Mysteries Research, 35 Fountain Road, Bridge of Allan, Scotland, FK9 4AU.

At the height of its fame between 1993 and 1995 Bonnybridge in Central Scotland captured world wide interest as an alleged UFO hotspot. Film crews from Japan, Germany and the United States (amongst others) visited the area. It was strongly featured in both the initial *Strange But True* television series and the accompanying book (1994). Almost every newspaper featured reports of UFO activity in the area, not only the tabloids (which might have been expected), but the 'heavies' such as 'The Guardian' where the matter was treated relatively seriously¹. Perhaps the pinnacle, or nadir (depending on your point of view), was reached with Nick Pope's statement in his book *Open Skies, Closed Minds* that there had been over 8,000 UFO incidents in Bonnybridge². (This, it should be noted, is in fact greater than the population of the town).

One might argue over the number of reported sightings but anyone interested in UFO investigation has to ask whether it was UFO reports alone that brought the area such attention or were other factors at work.

Although the town of Bonnybridge has implanted its name on ufology, many of the alleged incidents were reported by individuals over a much wider geographical area and larger population base. Sightings were reported from witnesses in Falkirk, Grangemouth, Larbert, Denny and surrounding villages such as Slamannan. This increases the potential witness pool substantially to around 100,000 and the geographical area involved to around 144 square miles³. Even so, Nick Pope is right : 8,000 incidents for 100,000 witnesses is still an extraordinarily high ratio.

Remote or isolated areas are often seen as particularly susceptible to UFO activity. However, it would be incorrect to classify any part of this area as 'remote' or isolated. In Grangemouth, for example, a few miles from Bonnybridge, there is one of the biggest petrochemical sites in Western Europe. In this part of Scotland, people are 30 minutes by car from the Glasgow conurbation and the same distance from Edinburgh. The M8, M9 and M876 motorways cut through the heart of the area and Bonnybridge is only minutes from all these roads. It is possible, however, that aspects of the geography of the area did play a part in encouraging UFO reports⁴.

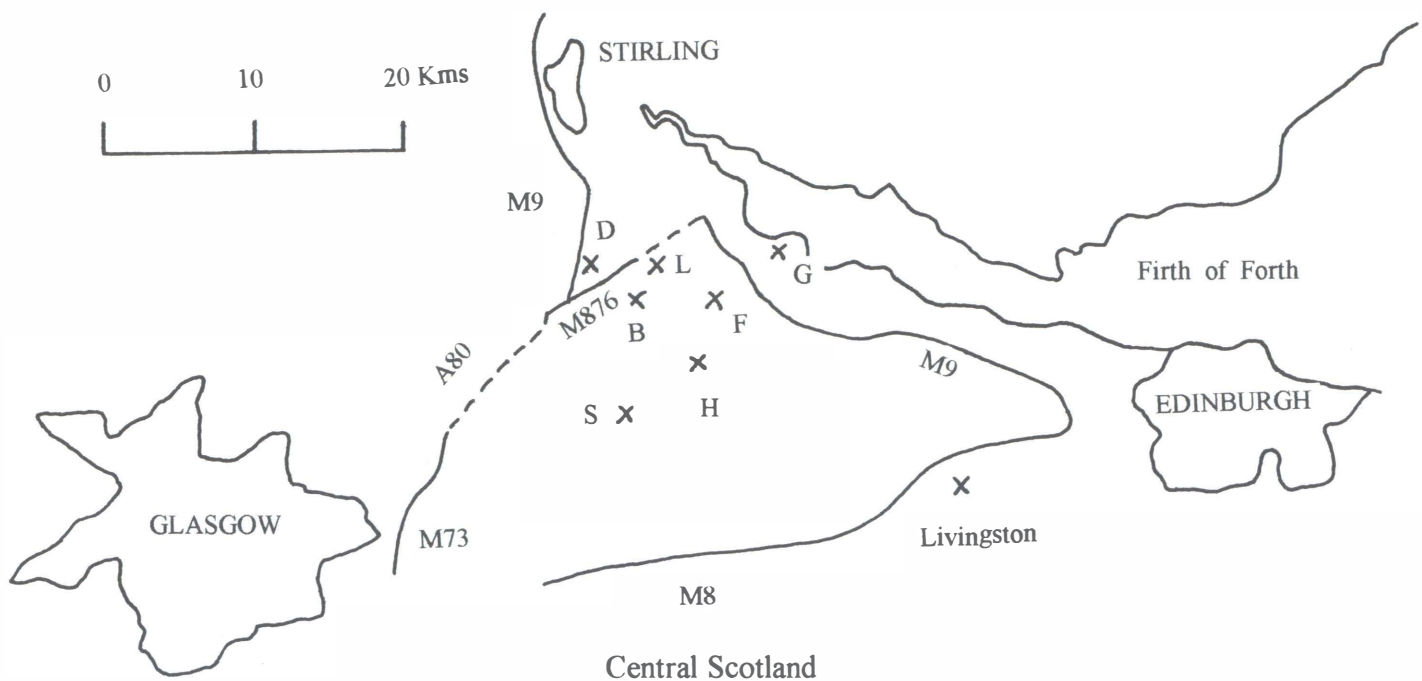
Drive two minutes out of Bonnybridge, or Slamannan, or Falkirk, and you arrive on high, relatively isolated ground with a good view across miles of countryside, and at night a relatively low level of light pollution. The Shieldhill area continues to attract UFO buffs convinced that strange phenomena are still to be seen here. It is reckoned to be one of the best skywatching sites in Scotland. So it is possible that the natural aspects of the Scottish countryside did lead to an increased level of reports. But it can hardly explain it as a phenomenon. There are certainly other areas in Scotland which would qualify almost as well : the West Lothian area, for example, which had at least as many documented sightings as Bonnybridge.

Villages like Slamannan and small towns like Bonnybridge do have higher rates of unemployment. Slamannan, for example, is an old mining village

with the mines long since gone. There are more people around with time on their hands. Time to gaze at the night sky ? More time to imagine things? It's a nice idea, but doubtful whether it works in practice unless we can show that the unemployed or others with lots of 'spare' time played a major role in boosting the number of UFO reports. One major problem is that so little material has been released by those involved in the investigation that witness analysis is inevitably limited in scope⁵. But from what little is available (and that mainly via the press) employed witnesses were involved at least as many times as unemployed. Bored people with nothing to do but report UFOs is no explanation for Bonnybridge.

One could look at various options covering the psychology of the inhabitants and the sociology of small communities, but one might not come out of it any the wiser. Although describing himself as 'the main principal investigator who was there at the time when the whole Bonnybridge wave began' Malcolm Robinson states that he 'cannot answer' why the town achieved its UFO status⁶. I think, however, it is in fact possible to go a long way towards explaining the development of Bonnybridge into a 'UFO window'. I would suggest that the explanation in this case and probably the answer to a lot of UFO excitement lies in the personalities involved plus the media. It is no coincidence that the UFO reports became intimately linked with the town of Bonnybridge when one of the key players was Billy Buchanan, councillor for the Bonnybridge area. But to take the media first :

Scotland is awash with competing local and national newspapers. In the Bonnybridge 'triangle' there can be found a variety of local papers. The main local journal was 'The Falkirk Herald', but other papers such as the 'Stirling Observer' can also be bought and also less 'local' papers, but carrying local news, such as the 'Edinburgh Evening News' (with an office in West Lothian, bordering the 'triangle') and the Glasgow based 'Evening Times'. Naturally, however, the real battle lay between the tabloids. Scotland's chief selling daily is the 'Daily Record'. In the run up to events at Bonnybridge the 'Record' was under attack from Rupert Murdoch's 'Sun', which had adopted the title 'The Scottish Sun'. To give an example of the intensity of the circulation battle, the 'Record' has been traditionally seen as a supporter of the Labour Party. As the political battle in Scotland



Key : B = Bonnybridge D = Denny F = Falkirk G = Grangemouth H = Shieldhill L = Larbert S = Shieldhill

is between Labour and the Scottish National Party, and younger voters are more inclined towards nationalist politics, 'The Sun' prior to 1992 general election came out in favour of an independent Scotland with its own parliament, government etc. This was viewed as a direct attempt to eat into the 'Record's' readership.

On top of this, traditional English-based papers, such as the 'Daily Express' and the 'Daily Mail' moved to increase their Scottish readership and began running Scottish editions with more Scottish stories. Another example of this trend (although after Bonnybridge was at its height) was the decision of the Aberdeen 'Press & Journal' to move out of its traditional northern heartland and set up an office in Stirling (beside the famous 'triangle'). This was all part of a general readership struggle. This period also saw the establishment in the central belt of Scotland of several new press agencies (one based in Falkirk, another in Stirling) all seeking and attempting to sell stories on UFOs. I would suggest that this competition for exciting stories explains in good part why Bonnybridge became very much a media exercise. And when journalists in radio and TV saw their press colleagues publishing UFO stories, they too joined in the act. The whole affair began to feed on itself.

However, media interest cannot be seen as the whole story. The catalyst, I would suggest, was the presence of an individual with local standing who could give credibility to the events. Billy Buchanan, a councillor of Falkirk District Council representing the Bonnybridge area, was well known to sections of the media before the UFO stories broke. He was viewed by journalists as a 'colourful' character and was generally well-liked. Buchanan on his own was enough to provide local papers with good copy, but during 1992 the story remained almost wholly of local interest.

In November 1992, one of Councillor Buchanan's claims for help was broadcast on Central FM, a local radio station. It was heard by UFO investigator Malcolm Robinson, who immediately contacted Buchanan⁷. The ingredients by December 1992 were complete. There were the witnesses, several of whom were prepared to talk publicly. There was an elected councillor who lived in the very village in which the sightings were taking place and who believed the witnesses' claims. There was also an official investigator from BUFORA, from outside the area, who could be seen (by the press) as impartial and could further justify their decision to publish UFO stories.

Events now really began to take off.

In January 1993, Buchanan announced to the press that he was holding a meeting to discuss UFO reports in the village. The story was well covered by Scotland's best-selling Sunday, 'The Sunday Post' (reputed readership : 1 million in a population of 5 million). The story included a photograph of Buchanan holding a notice announcing the meeting. The story began : 'A town plagued by UFOs has called in the experts as concern grows among residents', and included a statement that 'some will even be hypnotised in a bid to find any subconscious memories of being taken on board alien spacecraft'. At this early stage Malcolm Robinson, who was billed as speaking to the audience, was already prepared to assert that 'some of the sightings are totally inexplicable'.⁸

The article must have heightened rather than dampened expectations. The hypnotists did not turn up, but a talk was given to an audience of over 200, during which worldwide aspects of ufology were discussed, including some of the sensational South American cases.

Nonetheless, the presence at the centre of the phenomenon of an elected councillor meant that whatever way the story developed, it retained, as one respected radio journalist put it to me, 'a strong element of credibility'.⁹ It was Buchanan's involvement which gave serious papers like 'The Scotsman' (with an office in Falkirk) the nerve to run stories such as the arrival of a Japanese film crew in Bonnybridge to cover the UFO¹⁰ reports.

As the media coverage intensified, it is instructive to note that so did the number of UFO reports : four hundred in January 1993, according to Cllr Buchanan¹¹, 600 by the beginning of October 1994¹², 2,000 by the end of October 1995¹³, and finally 8,000 according to Nick Pope (August 1996). When I interviewed Malcolm Robinson in August 1996 for 'Phenomenal News', the magazine of Scottish Earth Mysteries Research, he informed me that the 'real' number of reports from the famous triangle number between 250 and 300¹⁴. Malcolm blames 'Strange But True' for hyping the reports to 2,000, although, to be fair, large numbers of alleged incidents were being claimed by Billy Buchanan before then.

Bonnybridge ended in comparative farce with the Zal-us affair, an alleged alien (Zal-us) who, it was claimed, had been in contact with Cllr Buchanan and was going to appear at a meeting in Falkirk Town Hall. The story was largely press nonsense, but, it could be said that 'those who live by the sword ...'. It might be argued that the press who had worked hard to build up the story in the end served to kill it off. However, the key element in Bonnybridge's decline was undoubtedly the withdrawal of the main protagonists from UFO investigation¹⁵. It is noticeable that after this the number of UFO stories dealing with Bonnybridge fell dramatically. When BBC Radio Scotland organised a live radio broadcast from Bonnybridge Community Centre in December 1996, they clearly expected dozens of local people to turn up and report their sightings. In fact, of the half a dozen people who did report a UFO, only two involved incidents in the general area of Bonnybridge¹⁶, and neither of recent vintage. Evidence points to the conclusion that although Central Scotland has many reported UFO sightings, Bonnybridge may have become intimately linked with the phenomenon more by chance than fact.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Guardian, 31.10.95.
2. P. 87.
3. See the various population reports produced by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, Registrar General, Scotland (e.g. CEN81 EA).
4. See OS Landranger Map 65.
5. In spite of intense media interest and BUFORA involvement, there has been no official BUFORA report, etc. My request for an investigation of the evidence by an independent group of ufologists was not taken up (see issue 164 of 'Northern UFO News').
6. Article in November 1996 issue of 'Strange Daze'.
7. See above but also my account of these early developments in issue 164 of 'Northern UFO News'.
8. 'Sunday Post', 31.1.93.
9. Private conversation with radio journalist who covered extensively the Bonnybridge stories.
10. 'Scotsman', 27.5.93.
11. 'Sunday Post', 31.1.93.
12. 'Edinburgh Evening News', 6.10.94.
13. 'The Guardian', 31.10.95.
14. 'Phenomenal News', Autumn 1996 issue (editor Viv Alexander).

15. 'UFO Councillor Quits Politics', 'Glasgow Herald', 4.3.96.
16. Broadcast on 26.12.96.

As part of our policy to give all sides an equal say in UFO debates *The New UFOlogist* is pleased to publish the following response to Ron Halliday's article by Malcolm Robinson of Strange Phenomena Investigations.

A Response to Ron Halliday's "The Bonnybridge Phenomenon" by Malcolm Robinson, of S.P.I.

Having read through Ron Halliday's article on Bonnybridge, I would have to agree with him that there have been certain elements of the Bonnybridge phenomenon that perhaps overshadowed the true issue of events ! What do I mean ? Well there is no denying that there was, and to some extents, still is, an aerial phenomenon occurring in the skies above Central Scotland which takes in the towns that Ron refers to in his article. Yes perhaps Bonnybridge was *not* the main focus for these UFO reports (what shock horror admission here !). That in reality these events did indeed stretch over a wide region of Stirlingshire in Central Scotland. The key player of course was local councillor Billy Buchanan. The press, as Ron rightly says, picked up on this, and used his 'stature' in the community as a figurehead for these incredible events. Coming from Bonnybridge and being a high standing member of the community and a councillor to boot he saw the name Bonnybridge become ever prominent in newspaper circles.

History will show that the next key player to become involved was myself, who assisted Billy in the collection of these ever growing UFO reports. Now don't kid yourself readers, there was a phenomenon occurring here that will never ever be in dispute. Accusations were levelled at both Billy and myself of, dare I say it, 'creating' this whole wave of reports (try telling that to the independent witnesses !). Readers, nothing could be further from the truth. I researched Bonnybridge (and other local nearby towns) with diligence and a desire to get to the truth. I followed the normal channels of investigation, i.e. airports, police, Ministry of Defence, meteorological offices, etc.

What I am saying is, being in the field of UFOlogy for over 17 years, one gets to know if the truth is being told or not, and I was happy with what was being told to me. I agree with Ron that the tabloid press had had a field day with Bonnybridge, and they had helped along and built up, this incredible story. But to their credit, the press did bring forward other witnesses, so we can at least thank them for that.

We have seen Gulf Breeze develop, we have seen Puerto Rico develop, but when it comes to a British UFO hot spot, this seems to create feelings of distrust and it-can't-be-so-therefore-it-isn't, type of attitude. I ask why ! Should we not have UFO sightings in Britain ? If that's the case, let's all pack up and go home.

What angers me the most, is the silly press UFO figures of UFO sightings in and around Bonnybridge. From 2,000 reports it's now up to 8,000 reports, I believe. What nonsense ! Don't believe a word of it. My own research has demonstrated that the true figures of bona fide which I cannot shift, lies between 300 and 350 reports, and you can take that to the bank !

I could go on at great length about the Bonnybridge issue, but as I am restricted for space I'll close by saying that the ZAL-US affair that Ron mentions in his article was unfortunate. It was complete nonsense which the press loved and used extensively. There is a story behind the ZAL-US affair which I'll be happy to inform readers about at a later date. But honestly, it had *nothing* at all to do with Bonnybridge.

Whilst Bonnybridge and surrounding districts are still producing UFO reports, the phenomenon would appear to have died somewhat. Is this because people are frightened to come forward with reports, having seen how others are treated ? Who knows ! Never judge a book by its cover or its characters. Contained within the nonsense of silly press reports was a real and genuine phenomenon, and I would say to those who still think of Bonnybridge as complete nonsense to remember that there are lots of things in life we don't currently understand, and to mock them and turn our heads away from them is an injustice to mankind's continuing search for knowledge and his quest to discover why these things happen in the first place.

One thing's for sure : the quest goes on. We can only hope that continued study into this most elusive

phenomenon will one day bear fruit and that we can understand the clarity of the current muddy waters of UFO research.

Malcolm Robinson. April 1997.

"Operation Flying Triangle"

By Victor J.Kean

Victor J. Kean is a contributing writer to UFO Magazine (USA) and 'Skysearch' Magazine (UK), and fully acknowledges his debt to the many individuals and UFO Groups around the World who have supplied him with data. He can be contacted via the Internet at 100545.1507@CompuServe.com

When sightings of the Flying Triangle (FT) began to appear in various UFO magazines and UFO Group reports, a few dedicated ufologists realised that, unlike the 'flying saucers' of the 1950s, in which almost every description appeared to differ from previous reports, the FT reports appeared to have similarities in both design configuration and its 'modus operandi'.

The 'Hudson Valley' wave of FT sightings which occurred in 1982-86 and which was documented in *Night Siege* by Dr. J.A. Hynek, Philip Imbrogno and Bob Pratt (Ballantine, 1987) highlighted the difficulty in arriving at common agreement in observer descriptions. The term 'Boomerang' competing with 'Triangle' was used to describe the craft which plagued the valley. A count of both these descriptive terms gave 'Triangle' the edge, though the matter was further confused by a photograph showing an obvious Triangle with a boomerang-shaped curve of lights ! In addition, the terms, 'Arrow-head', 'Crescent', 'Delta', 'Deltoid', 'Flying Wing', 'Vee-shaped' and 'Wedge' are also found to be in common usage.

Skeptics suggest that a highly advanced 'Stealth' aircraft (probably of US Military design) is responsible for these FT sightings. The possibility that a US aircraft would, or could, silently hover for long periods over residential areas was accepted by some until early FT sighting reports came to light precluding this possibility. Although there are a few earlier reports of triangular-shaped craft (1941 - 1959), the sighting which was reported in the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* (September 9th 1960)

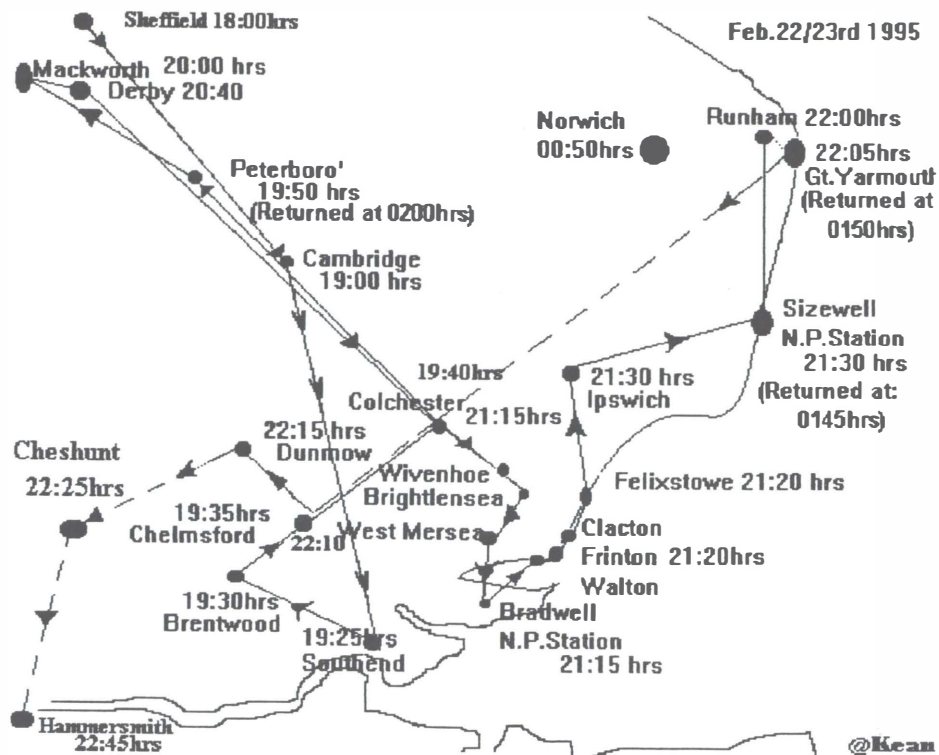
when a FT was seen over Consett, Durham, UK at 1930 hrs GMT the previous day, appears to be identical with today's triangular UFO. Later reports that same evening were received from South Shields and Fawdon and Fenham, Newcastle. A Mr. Otley saw the FT 'circling over Deanham Gardens, Fenham' between 8.15 and 8.40 hrs GMT. His wife described the FT as 'a triangular formation of lights with a red light in the centre'. (*Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, September 9th 1960)

The Belgian wave of 1989/1990, during which literally thousands of people saw and reported the FT and which culminated in the now famous 'lock-on' by Belgian Airforce jets (March 30th 1989) confirmed what many had already believed, either the FT was 'alien' or, at least, its technology and 'modus operandi' were 'alien'.

As more and more FT reports were received, an attempt at understanding the phenomenon was made by Omar Fowler (PRA Derby). Omar Fowler realised that the FT displayed certain flight characteristics which were repeated on many occasions. These included direction and speed of travel, EM effects and various other behavioural patterns (see *The Flying Triangle Mystery*, available from 94, The Circle, Derby DE24 9HR). Unlike certain UFO groups who jealously guard their sighting reports, PRA Derby freely share their reports with other researchers. In my opinion, the lack of willingness to share reports by some UFO groups is a contributing factor to why we know so little about the phenomenon after the past 50 years of the so called modern era. Equally forthcoming is Ron West, Chairman of the Essex UFO Research Group whose area has been plagued with FT sightings over the past three years.

Using a computer database with a powerful 'Sort and Search' facility, verified FT reports from both these and many other groups and individuals are fed into the database. Gradually, what at first appeared to be random sightings occurring at widely distributed locations begin to show some possible flight patterns.

It was the 40 sightings from the UK which occurred on February 22nd 1995 which embraced four counties and which were reported by some 54 individuals, including Police Officers, that first highlighted the possibility of 'tracking' the FT. This assumes, of course, that it is the same craft which is sighted on all occasions.



Map of the events of Feb.22nd 1995

The situation is complicated by the fact that two FTs were reported from Derby (20:40hrs)

The sightings are in four 'stages':

1. 19:00hrs - 20:00hrs
2. 21:15hrs - 21:30hrs
3. 22:00hrs - 22:50hrs
4. 00:50hrs - 02:00hrs

The reports from the Derby area neatly fill the gap in time during which the FT was not seen over Essex. (19:40 hrs to 21:15 hrs)

'Operation Flying Triangle' was born out of the need for more FT reports. On June 1st 1996 a world-wide circular was sent to some 25 leading UFO groups seeking their co-operation in this endeavour.

As expected the response has been light, nevertheless the number of verified sightings received from Europe and the UK is now 2,470 covering 1995 alone.

Obviously, recording the details of the sighting

reports is not an end in itself. An analysis of the data is required if one is to gain some 'insight' into the phenomenon.

At first glance, it is obvious that the FT is most often sighted during the hours of darkness : the first sighting for any evening getting later as the year progresses. Similarly, the last sighting towards dawn is reported earlier as the hours of darkness decrease. Daylight sightings are rare but not unknown.

One wonders why the FT displays apex lights if it is not wanting to be observed, but I believe that these three lights commonly seen at the three points of the shape are possibly not 'lights' at all, but some other form of apparatus which emit light. Whilst the majority of these are described as white, a significant number are described as white/yellow, amber or just yellow. Other colours have also been observed: red, green and blue and various colours which tax the observer's powers of description. On occasions the FT is reported as showing no lights whatsoever.

Footnote:

The database later highlighted the fact that the FT sightings in the Newcastle area were preceded by a

visit six years earlier.

On August 2nd 1954, a silver FT was reported over Wallsend, Tyne, UK. It was seen silently rotating in tight circles above the town at 00:00hrs GMT. (Larry Hatch, USA)

UFOLOGY PROVES IT'S POINT

An Article by Malcolm Robinson on a Recent T.V. Success for UFOlogy.

Will UFOlogy ever be proved a serious subject ? We all know that it finds itself at the forefront of many a media joke, and no matter how impressive the evidence can be, apart from the 'would-be believers', UFOlogy has never really proven its point. Well not so !

The case for UFOlogy was recently proven in court (admittedly a mock court). On Friday 21st March 1997, Grampian Television based in Aberdeen, Scotland, completed its series of programmes entitled "WE THE JURY". This programme is set up in a court and takes in topical issues that the general public would like to see debated. For its last programme in the current series, they decided to debate the issue of UFOs in Scotland and the people who have claimed to have seen them. Was there a case to be answered ? Are UFOs and alien sightings a reality ?

For the first time in the history of UFOlogy, the subject was to be given a serious hearing in court with a professional jury made up of individuals from all walks of life. Presenting the case for the reality of UFOs was Malcolm Robinson, founder of Scottish research group Strange Phenomena Investigations, whose study into the wave of UFO sightings over Bonnybridge in Central Scotland is well known. Opposing the belief that UFOs are a reality, was arch sceptic and debunker, Mr Steuart Campbell from Edinburgh, whose books debunking UFOs and the Loch Ness Monster are well known.

Supporting Steuart in the court audience, were many professional and amateur astronomers, including Professor Archie Roy of Glasgow University. Clearly then, the opposition was of high standing and their views that UFOs were a 'non reality' would no doubt be presented with academic vigour.

Mr Robinson's supporters for the motion that UFOs

were a 'reality' were made up primarily of UFO witnesses which also included Scotland's most famous 'UFO abductees' Garry Wood and Colin Wright, and also SPI members including Billy Devlin. The stage was set then for what looked like a heated debate, and never have more truer words been said !

As this was not a recording but going out live over various parts of Northern Scotland, it was a major platform to present UFOlogy fairly and accurately to the nation without any editing or people telling you what you could or could not say. Sure we've had Kilroy Silk and other daytime T.V. programmes debating the issue, but this was different, this was in court, with a proper jury. Could UFOlogy prove its point, or would it fail miserably as the astronomers teased it to shreds ? Well the scene was set, the gloves were on, it was time to do battle.

Mr Robinson then took the floor and spoke to the jury about close proximity UFO sightings, radar visual sightings, and the fact that the sheer volume and weight of 'impressive UFO cases' were growing each year. He asked the jury to consider this, and also to remember the fact that this was truly a global phenomenon of immense importance. The hushed court listened intently as Mr Robinson delivered his speech, after which it was the turn of sceptic Steuart Campbell to present his case.

Reading from his notes, Mr Campbell asked the jury to consider that there was no concrete evidence to prove that aliens or UFOs were visiting this planet, and that the whole of UFOlogy could be explained away as having natural explanations from temperature inversion layers to mirages.

His plea over, it was then the turn of the court audience to voice their opinion on the matter, and boy, did they voice their opinion. The arguments swung from left to right as both sets of 'believers' and 'non believers' aired their views. Brian McMullan, lead guitarist with Glasgow UFO rock band CE IV, was not being put off by the astronomical explanations being given from the other side of the courtroom, and he spoke with contempt at these views and gave a scathing attack on Campbell for supporting them.

Soon the TV courtroom was filled with arguments swinging from both sets of 'supporters' and one was beginning to think that things were getting out of

hand. A cut for commercials soon came round which gave time for emotions to be cooled. Resuming the debate, one astronomer stated angrily, that no other astronomer had ever witnessed a UFO, a point which UFOlogists can prove otherwise (i.e. Professor Clyde Tombaugh, who discovered the planet Pluto).

During the course of this 'live' TV debate, viewers were asked to phone in with their own views on the matter - did they believe in UFOs ? Had they seen one ? Soon the phones were virtually ringing off their hooks !! The presenter then asked Garry Wood to inform the jury and watching TV audience about his own UFO abduction. Garry delivered an emotional and honest account of his experience, which was backed up by his friend Colin Wright who also shared this same double abduction. The sceptics continued to press home their point that UFOs were a 'non reality' and could be explained away. At which point Malcolm Robinson came in and said to one sceptic, 'Have you ever actually sat down and studied the UFO data?', to which he replied, 'No'.

The debate raged on and tempers were becoming a bit frayed. All too soon though, the programme was coming to an end, and both Mr Robinson and Mr Campbell were asked to give a 45 second summing up of their case to the jury. Campbell continued to stress the point that UFOs were all misidentifications of ordinary mundane objects, whereas Robinson stressed the need to 'examine the evidence for oneself' to look and search for the honest UFO data which was there in abundance.

With that, it was time for the jury to deliver their verdict. What would it be ? The courtroom was hushed as the Jury foreman was asked to give its verdict, which was, 'We the jury find the case for the reality of the UFO phenomenon proven by 9 votes to 3'. This verdict was greeted by ecstatic applause by supporters of UFOlogy, whilst the amateur and professional astronomers and UFO sceptic Professor Archie Roy sat silent with facial expressions of abject disappointment and disbelief !

This victory for UFOlogy was made all the sweeter knowing that we were up against strong opposition who were not ordinary members of the public as such, but professional and amateur astronomers. So for the first time in British television history the case for UFOs was 'PROVEN'. But wait, there's more. Grampian Television were snowed under by

telephone calls from members of the public who also believed there was a case to be answered. A staggering 86 % of the public felt strongly that UFOs were a reality.

So UFOlogy scored a victory which was celebrated back at the hotel into the wee small hours by members of SPI and also English UFOlogist Eric Morris who was flown up by Grampian to participate.

The platform for the reality of UFOs was taken on and won that night. The fight now goes on to show the world that it must now look at this subject with serious eyes and recognise the importance of UFOlogy. New cases are emerging every day, and we can only hope that the ridicule that this subject has endured throughout the years will finally be put to rest. It was that night, and boy, victory tastes sweet.

Malcolm Robinson.

Editorial Comment :

The astronomers who appeared on this programme were Graham Young of the Dundee Astronomical Society, Brian Kelly of Mills Observatory, Dundee and Gill Russell of Aberdeen Planetarium. Also appearing were Dr Geoffrey Scobie, a psychologist from the University of Glasgow, Professor Jack Cohen, a biologist from the University of Warwick and Dr David Weeks, a psychologist.

Readers are invited to respond to some of the sentiments in Malcolm Robinson's article. Was it really a 'victory' for UFOlogists to demonstrate the 'reality' of UFOs in a brief but soon forgotten television programme ? Is this the right way to convince the scientific community at large that some UFO reports deserve serious scientific study (a fact which seemed perfectly acceptable to several of the speakers on the sceptical side) ? And why should astronomers be chosen by Grampian TV as the main representatives of the sceptical community ? Letters please to the Editorial address on page 2 !

Steuart Campbell Replies

The Editorial Board invited Steuart Campbell to respond to Malcolm Robinson's article, and this is his reply :

"The question put to the jury was originally going to

be: 'Do UFOs exist?' (or something like that). It got changed after I pointed out that the question begged the further question of defining a 'UFO'. So they changed it to 'Have aliens visited Earth?'. Malcolm hasn't made that plain to you.

I do not feel inclined to respond directly to Malcolm's poorly written and jubilant rambling. I see that he has not sent you his script (he did have one, even though he didn't seem to need to read it). But in response, I could let you have my script [sent but not reproduced here. Editor]. If you see the video, you'll see that Malcolm's account is a bit one-sided. McMullin was very offensive. I don't know what Malcolm means by 'a professional jury'; they were just 12 ordinary people (by the way, juries in Scotland normally have 15 people, so it wasn't even a typical Scottish jury). Nor is there such a verdict in Scotland as 'proven' (there is 'guilty', 'not guilty' or 'not proven'). The jury was merely asked for their answer to the question 'Have aliens visited Earth?'. Whatever answer they give proves nothing - twelve ordinary people with no experience of UFO reports and no special knowledge are not equipped to give a definitive answer. They did not hear much reasoned debate and there was no cross examination. It was just a programme for entertainment.

I was not surprised by the outcome (well I was surprised that 3 members agreed with me!). The jury were probably heavily influenced by Gary and Colin telling of their experience on the A70 (a case I have not been allowed to investigate properly - Malcolm occasionally asks me questions but doesn't allow me to get near his witnesses and Gary and Colin are not co-operative). The more bizarre aspects of the A70 case comes from hypnotic regression, outlawed by BUFORA but not apparently by SPI. It seems that Malcolm is not now an accredited investigator for BUFORA.

Both Malcolm and I have (separately) addressed audiences at the Edinburgh International Science Festival in a series of talks called 'The Truth Behind the X-Files'. His was entitled 'Scottish Ufology What's Going On?' (22 March); mine was entitled 'The Y-Files' (4 April, last night). Both talks were given in the same lecture theatre (I attended his but he didn't attend mine). Neither of us read from notes! Both talks were packed out (what does that show?). I seem to have convinced my audience that every UFO report had a down-to-earth explanation and many people were buying my book afterwards. "

[Readers may be interested in an interview with Malcolm Robinson by Ron Halliday in *Phenomenal News From Scotland*, issue 5 (Winter/Spring 1997), in which Robinson discusses his personal interest in the use of hypnotic regression, despite its flaws. Editor].

Malcolm Robinson and S.P.I. can be contacted at 29 Kent Road, Alloa, Clackmannanshire, Scotland, FK10 2JN.

Is That An Implant In Your Pocket - Or Are You Just Pleased To See Me ? Ufology - Live In Lytham Andy Roberts

Assistant Editor, *UFO Times*
Former Editor, *UFO Brigantia*

It's one a.m. in a hotel bar in deepest Lytham St Annes at a post UFO conference 'do'. A heated discussion about the veracity of the 'alien autopsy' film has just finished and M.O.D. UFO sleuth turned author Nick Pope is grooving on the dance floor to the Grease Medley. I've just had my first conversation with Philip Mantle in several years (he doesn't have horns, nor was he munching on fresh baby) and there is generally a mellow vibe about the proceedings. Ruminating on the place of violence in ufology, I concluded that . . . but let's go back to the beginning.

UFO conferences are really quite amazing events. If you've never been to one I suggest you start going immediately. At a conference you get to hear some fantastic speakers, catch up with the latest theories on important cases and generally check out what's happening. You get to meet interesting people, touch the garments of the ufological stars, see the latest fashions in books and merchandising and have lots of fun.

You also get to see the ufological wildlife at a water-hole during its annual migration round the country. Who is actually at a conference, who speaks, what they are allowed to speak about, who organises, who speaks to who, who is talked about, is a fascinating insight into ufological politics in this country. And make no mistake about it, UFO politics, the personalities of the investigators and their petty likes

and dislikes are what forms the public perception of the subject, whether any of us like it or not. Conferences, we love 'em.

Having been an avid conference goer and organiser over the years, I was intrigued as to what the Lancashire group LAPIS' conference would be like. So I went. Entitled The CIA Conference (Conspiracies, Implants, Abductions) it took place on the 16/17 November at Lytham. Congratulations to LAPIS for putting on such a varied line-up in such an excellent venue. The conference was well organised and worthwhile, having much of the feel of the old IUN Sheffield conferences about it.

First up on the Saturday was Marcus Allen, editor of Nexus magazine. Marcus has a good line in conspiracies and, of course, a magazine to sell. Marcus sensed we were in need of amusement on that rainy Saturday morning and duly obliged, by treating us to that hoary old chestnut known as The Americans Probably Didn't Really Go To The Moon. Yup, they filmed it all in a desert or on a stage set somewhere. Why?

Either because their cameras didn't work on the real mission and they just *had* to have holiday snaps so as not to look stupid. Or was it for far more sinister reasons not really clarified? Probably. That's the thing with conspiracies, you can believe what you like and no one will gainsay you. Marcus' reasoning was backed up with official moon photos which, he said, showed that both the lighting and camera angles were somehow 'wrong', implying that the whole deal had been staged. Nothing was said about how NASA had probably light flooded the photographs during the development process to make them more viewer-friendly. In fact, what Marcus was *actually* saying (I believe you young folk call it a 'sub-text') was the entire American intelligence agency is more stupid than us because it can't even hoax some photographs properly. The same conspiratorial reasoning applied to the alleged UFO cover-up works the other way round because of course they are clever enough to have pulled the wool over our eyes for years, hiding the TRUTH about aliens. Make your mind up please. If I'm wrong and someone out there knows about this theory write us an article or send a letter. I thought Marcus was talking complete gonads but the audience lapped it up.

A vote taken at the end revealed that 80% of those

present actually believed what Marcus was saying !

Michael Lindemann is a name probably not too familiar to ufologists in the UK but he's a biggy on the US circuit and one of the most eloquent and informed speakers I have seen. It was a joy to hear him talk. Michael hauled out another old favourite out of the ufological jewel box and polished it up for us to wonder at. This one has many names. Born as the Education Programme it also likes to pass itself off as The Truth Is Comin' Soon. It was a popular number in the 1950s when Donald Keyhoe invented it (and much of ufology if the truth be told) and what goes around comes around, and here it was again. Better dressed but still the same.

Religious analogues aside (and sadly ignored by Lindemann I'm afraid) we were asked to consider that the increase in UFO imagery in advertising, the latest slew of UFO films and in popular culture generally was part of a subtle build up to a revelation about the alien presence on Earth. This revelation was going to be revealed very, very soon. Or maybe, Michael said, we would suddenly find ourselves accepting that it had happened without really being certain of who told us and when. Aliens would just sort of be here, shopping in Tesco's, and we wouldn't question what was going on. Our paradigm would have been subtly shifted with our complete acceptance and compliance.

Lindemann's argument was persuasive, but ignores key aspects of the development of ufology and its imagery in society. It's been a long slow process starting well before the 1947 Arnold sighting, speeding up through the 50s, 60s and 70s and, as the subject of ufology has become exponentially popular the images have multiplied too and are as common in advertising as, say, the use of blues music is in advertising jeans or crap American beer. But not because it's in advance of the landing Michael, surely. But then why, asked Lindemann, do people easily accept the finer nuances of the UFO subject when it's displayed in advertising etc, if it's not because we all want to believe they're here, to meekly accept this propaganda which is effectively socially engineering a whole nation into accepting an alien invasion, or at the very least accepting the *idea* of an alien invasion. Yes, that's what he was saying. Would we, have we, been so stupid as to fall for that one? (excuse me there's a tentacle at the window).

It has always been the case that the sceptical

European researchers interpreted what Lindemann was talking about in terms of the alien/UFO image being a potent image of our time, mythic in nature, whose manifestations through the experiences of abductees reflects the times we live in. Put simply, in a post nuclear, desecrated, ****-ed up, crazy world we are desperately seeking intervention from outside. And that's what the central argument in modern ufology is all about. Is it true, or merely false ? Or both of these things ? A symptom of the looming millennium if you like. Call me a raving psycho-social theorist if you will but that's what I still see. No time schedule was put on this approaching event, so like all these scenarios there is plenty room for widening the goalposts. If there was a dearth of alien imagery in culture no doubt the reasoning would be that it is being covered up to prevent us knowing that the invasion is coming. You can't have it both ways.

Fundamentally Lindemann is a literalist and like all literalists he was certain with a capital C. His pronouncements about the ensuing invasion were punctuated with a very definite, "All we can say for sure, is it sure is coming."

Sure?

Sure . . .

But credit where it's due and Lindemann has done far more in-the-trenches ufology that you or I will ever do, so what makes him believe these things so fervently? I really want to know. Read his books, watch his videos, Michael Lindemann is very much a man to watch in American ufology.

At the end of his talk he asked for questions from the audience. A little voice spoke up, 'My name is Harry Harris.....'.

Don't worry grapple fans, he returns in the second act....

Jenny Randles next, giving us a look at how themes in ufology have shifted and changed. An interesting and thoughtful talk raising some key issues about *how* we look at the evidence presented to us. She raised the sometimes even more baffling than usual elements of some cases, like the alleged MIB visit in the Templeton photo case. And she stressed how our answers to the UFO mystery most probably will be plural rather than with an ETH singularity. But you only get that if your questions are plural in the first place.

Jenny's material was perhaps a little too restrained

for the majority of the audience who were naturally wanting something more tangible, but Jenny is always pertinent and worth listening to. Jenny's way of looking at ufology showed clearly the huge difference between European and American ufological world views.

Derrel Sims, according to the conference blurb, is '...arguably the most important ufologist in the world today'. O.K., let's argue. He's into the myth of fingerprints and that's what front end UFO research is about these days in the colonies. Bugger all this airy fairy nonsense about documents and intelligence leaks - no substance to them. And crashed saucers are ok, but the ufological unwashed have realised they are never going to get their grubby mitts on them and so the hard physical evidence they so crave and believe in, has to come from somewhere else.

Witness the rise of the implant in ufology. Here is the body's very own piece of alien artefacture, its very own crashed saucer. The government can't get to it first and should you be lucky (?) enough to find you have one there's no messing about with autopsy tents and low-loaders in the desert. Nope, it's straight round to your Uncle Derrel and his chums who will arrange to have it surgically removed (in some cases under hypnosis...'you are getting sleepy' -'no I'm bloody well not!'). And he's got the videos to prove it. I toyed with the idea of buying one during the break but was glad I didn't. Derrel let us have a looksee for free in his talk and it was like an episode of Jimmy's, man with knife opens body, removes small metal blob, all wonder in awe.

Much was made of the fact that even though many of these objects are clearly identified by scans to be in a very definite area of flesh, it took the surgeons ages to actually find them. Meaning what exactly ? God knows. But this approach pays off and things were found, oh yes. Things that no one knew what they were, things which didn't look like anything in particular. Analysis was inconclusive, though Derrel hinted at 'off world isotopes' quite a bit. But that's the nature of 'evidence'. Remember Joe Simonton's pancakes? Recall the 'jewels' brought back from fairyland. Ordinary stuff borne of extraordinary experiences. What's the betting that **not one single implant** discovered by Derrel will ever be found to be extraterrestrial in origin?

One case mentioned involved a young girl who had sneezed out several small gold balls from her nose.

Kids put stuff up their noses all the time. Could it be a bit of a toy perhaps? But I'm sceptical not only of implants but of the methods used to retrieve them. Is it really a good thing to encourage people in the belief that they have subcutaneous matter which may well have been placed there by aliens who will - make no mistake about it- return to you again and again? This stuff freaks people out. Believing it is actually a symptom of schizophrenia (did anyone notice really early on in the Eastenders plot which charted Joe Wickes' painful descent into hell, he was sat on a sofa reading a copy of *UFO Magazine*? Is part of the 'Education Programme' telling us that reading UFO 'zines will send us mad?'). I'm unconvinced and not a little worried by these methods.

One slide showed by Derrel was taken from *Nature* (vol. 323, 1986), showing an anomalous object in a chromosome sample. Derrel's theory seems to run that if it is anomalous and in the body then it may well be an implant. Fair reasoning you might think. Fair if you believe in implants that is. But Derrel hadn't realised that the 'explanation' to this was in a subsequent issue of that learned journal, and was identified as a Diatom skeleton. I'm going to make this information available to Derrel and we'll let you know what he makes of this 'explanation'. He and his wife gave a workshop later that evening going into his techniques in more depth which I didn't attend but reports spoke of a panoply of methods now available to US abduction researchers to ensnare their quarry.

If the aliens are so clever as to..., then why do they ...aww no, I'm not going through all that again. Write in and let us know what you feel about implant research. Better still, write in and let us know if you've got an implant. Promise we won't tell Derrel!

Nick Pope spoke last on the Saturday. His tenure of the UFO desk at the MOD resulted in the book *Open Skies, Closed Minds*, possibly one of the worst ever UFO books. In person he gives an excellent lecture but it is still bland and rather pointless. If Johnny - or Jenny - Ufologist stood on stage and said what Nick did people would fall asleep. But because Nick is seen to represent 'the government', the audience is rapt and seats are dampened. But no information is imparted. If I didn't believe in them I'd suspect a disinformation plot! Why do alleged government secrets exert such a pull on people? A Freudian analyst would have a field day with it I'm sure. It's

clear that Nick is a keen adherent of the extraterrestrial hypothesis and that's his business, but I would have liked just a tad more proof of how he came to that conclusion, based on things he learned whilst in office at the MOD.

His explanation of why he could reveal things from an official point of view without hindrance - a point which had always bothered me - was convincingly explained. It was because the second Andy MacNab SAS 'kill and tell' book had driven a coach and horses through the MOD publications policy in such a way that it was pointless trying to stop it. I later met Nick at the LAPIS 'do' and he forgave me for my review of his book in *UFO TIMES* and actually agreed with many of the points I made. Apparently his next book will reflect his days at the MOD dealing with ufological matters via a 'diary' approach, giving some insight into day to day government UFO dealings, and will not be ghost written. I look forward to it.

Sunday's entertainment opened with Simon Lewis from the North Lancashire UFO Investigation Group. Simon gave us a guided tour round the development of triangular craft both historically and in respect of the current upsurge in sightings of triangular UFOs. The belief that they represent some form of 'test' craft under development is a seductively wonderful one. It gives us the chance to blame these sightings on 'them' and strengthens the conspiracy lobby within the subject. We should be careful of easy, slick explanations. Unfortunately, and apropos of nothing, Simon brought the Moon into play late in the game. Strange structures seem to exist on some photos of the moon. Yeah? The photos he showed weren't impressive. Another one showed a small version of the 'Face On Mars', and lo and behold if you squinted and tilted your head, it did ! But so what? The 'face' on Mars is interesting only because it vaguely looks like a face. The term for the natural replication of images is simulacra - and no one has ever been able to explain why the 'face' on Mars isn't cosmic simulacra. Maybe they don't want to because it would spoil playtime. Remember when Esther Rantzen used to have those 'amusing' potatoes on her TV show which resembled people/faces/insert name of favourite organ here. Well, that's Mars that is. To be obsessed with or be affected by the pull of moon is sheer lunacy and I thought this detour into moominland marred an otherwise excellent talk.

Derrel's wife Doris took the stage next to expound

the basics of handwriting analysis (graphology) and how they can be applied to abduction cases. In theory this could give insight into when an abductee is lying, remembering, recalling emotionally charged material or whatever. It could. But it failed to take account of the fact that if someone has had a 'UFO' or 'abduction' experience there is no need to assume that it was a literal, physically real one. The experience still takes place though, is real to the witness, and the memories will be recalled in the same way as 'real' memories and will therefore show up under graphological analysis, therefore proving that graphology has a place to play in abduction research.....and back to the beginning again. As a new weapon in the armoury of the modern day abductee hunter I thought it was misleading, unimpressive and dangerous. It's bad enough when employers use graphology to determine whether or not a potential employee is worth appointing or not (hey, it happens). Using these techniques in an attempt to identify abductees is a tricky business, wide open to criticism and interpretation. When, oh when, will people realise that the only way to ascertain if someone has been consorting with space aliens is to see if they've got a cat called Beelzebub and a supernumerary nipple. If there is still any doubt then toss 'em in the village pond and see if they float! It was that useless.

Following Doris' instructions during her talk we were invited to compare a sample of our own handwriting with her findings. I did. I was sensitive, not attentive to detail, had fluctuating reality and ambiguity. Yeah? Now what's that strange lump in my nose? I rest my case.

Michael Lindemann returned to the stage to talk about abductions from a futurist perspective. Good stuff again with Lindemann going into the reasons for alien visitation. The gist seemed to be that they are unhappy about our plight and what we are doing to the planet. This is why so many abductees are fed images of a world destroyed and sent back with a 'mission'. In his words: "The alien abduction phenomenon may represent some sort of corrective initiative". But again, although what he is saying about the reasons for the visitors' presence could be true, it is equally self evident to our subconscious minds (and if you believe in such a thing, to our collective unconscious) and it would be natural for myth and vision to reflect those concerns. One interesting case he outlined though was the Allegash abduction, little known about in the UK. In this

event four men out wilderness camping were out fishing on a lake using a camp-fire as a marker when they had an experience with an anomalous light.

Returning to the camp-fire after what they thought was a short time, they found that the fire was burnt out long since. Subsequently all four have recalled an abduction experience, drawing similar aliens. A case worth getting to know more about (there is a Raymond Fowler book about it) mainly because it's this sort of thing that makes an eminently sensible man like Lindemann say that there will soon be 'widespread open contact between humans and an alien intelligence'. Phew !

If he's right in **any** of what he says then DON'T PANIC!!!!!!!!!!

If he's wrong then he's still an excellent speaker.

The Alien Autopsy film has made certain people a lot of money. It's also made other people famous and it has raised the profile of ufology (for the worse in my opinion) higher than ever before. Philip Mantle has been at the centre of this firestorm and the brunt of much criticism. Only a professional Yorkshireman like Philip could withstand it for this long without cracking up (with laughter), but I think it's water off the proverbial duck's back to him. Personally I think he has been an unwitting dupe of a very clever hoax. But out of it he's got a great story to tell round the camp-fire. A story of its time and one which will keep him in free dinners and invites to UFO conferences for a long time yet. It's a dirty job but someone's got to do it apparently.

Philip told the story clearly and with some humour. The 'tent' footage was shown, this being film which has not been widely seen (but it's my bet that it appears on video soon) and is considerably different to the commercial video. In this segment two white coated bods are seen rooting around with entrails and such like. But something's not quite right here. Their body language suggests boredom, a certain element of relaxation and not the professional military alertness you would expect from people who were first witness to a realisation that would change the universe for mankind for ever. No, they had a distinctly louche attitude about them. Could it just have been my imagination or did I see tufts of hair coming out from under their surgical hats. Would military personnel of 1947 have hair which showed or would they have had brutal military crew-cuts ?

Would hoaxers be so stupid as to let this show ? If you get the chance to see this film, do so and bear these points in mind.

The film also seemed to have a different 'quality' to it too. The movement seemed 'looser' and there was altogether a different feel to the film we are familiar with. Perhaps I'm clutching at straws, refusing to accept the inevitable. If I was then I wasn't alone. A show of hands at the end showed that only about fifteen people in the audience believed the film was genuine. Apparently this is a success for Philip as he said only four people believed it at the Fortean Times UnConvention. Perhaps a cult is starting! Philip acquitted himself well, dealing with his only heckler with ease. An up and coming Midlands investigator who seemed to have a bee in her bonnet about Mr Mantle's activities was silenced early in her heckle with a quick 'Perhaps you'd be good enough to be quiet madam,... whoever you are'. She was.

I had to miss Derrel Sim's closing talk owing to an urgent Roy Harper gig (who?!) in Liverpool. But there was drama in the break as I left. Harry Harris, abductee researcher and solicitor was ushered onto the stage for an impromptu ten minute spot. UFO politics alert ! There had obviously been some double dealing in the LAPIS camp. Whilst some LAPIS members were opposed to even having to breathe the same air as Harry, certain other members obviously had other ideas. Cue impending disaster.

In what I thought was a bold and commendable move LAPIS founder member and *New Ufologist* editor Joe Dormer stormed towards the stage, fists raging, to confront Harris shouting....."Harris, you are a ****-***** on the ***** of ufology". Well, I can't tell you can I ? It may not be suitable to repeat in a public forum if Harry's listening. But it was very funny and totally apposite. Ask any switched on ufologist and they'll know, maybe they'll even tell you ! Proceedings were halted before fisticuffs could ensue and Harris got his two minutes of fame which seemed to consist of information about why Dr Sue Blackmore couldn't possibly be right. Whether this was because Harry just didn't agree with her or whether there was any salient evidence on offer was unclear and the audience drifted off in dribs and drabs for tea.

So that was it for me. Implants, abductions, arguments, intrigue, excellent cappuccino, dancing MOD men, silenced hecklers, the ongoing

implementation of the Great Conspiracy. It was all at Lytham. It's all at every UFO conference, no matter who is running them. You know you need to get out more - go to a UFO conference.

Andy Roberts.

Please Turn Off The Lights When You Leave ... Peter D. Rendall

One of the interesting facts about any craze or 'flap' is that when it's all over and the hysteria dies down, so the memorabilia and 'evidence' of that craze fades away in direct proportion to the diminishing *raison d'etre*, only emerging sporadically in the distant future as artifacts on some programme such as *Antiques Roadshow*. There, experts can wax lyrical about this Beatles toy or that Rolling Stones guitar.

But has anyone seen them bring on a Plasma Vortex lately ?

One of the main pieces of 'evidence' cited by CERES in its case for the 'genuine' crop circle was the causal factor, in this case thought to be a form of electrically-charged whirlwind. It was this wind which formed in the lee of hills and, when conditions were 'right', it dropped neatly into crop fields and left its mark.

As the circles hysteria mounted and the patterns in the cereal fields got wackier, so the vortex had to 'evolve' to match the circles - which, according to the experts, it did. So did the eye-witness accounts - another piece of 'undeniable evidence'. These sightings from across the years formed the focal point of CERES' argument that circles had *always* been with us. So both the scientists and the New Age circle followers rushed off to find eye-witness accounts with which to back their particular theory. But there was a problem here, if only we'd stopped to think about it; an eye-witness account is fine, just so long as there are witnesses and, better still, photographs/films to accompany the sighting.

In at least one case, where two people claimed to have seen a whirlwind forming a series of circles, there was an awful lot of publicity and rejoicing amongst some of the scientific fraternity. One thing was missing : any sort of film of these circles, either as they formed or afterwards. When the fuss had

died down questions needed to be asked; if these folk had seen something happening, something so exciting that they rushed to the papers, why didn't they take pictures ? Even the local farmer said he'd not seen anything in his fields. A public footpath crossed the area where these circles were said to have appeared, so pleas for information were put in the local papers: but to no avail.

Then there was the case of 'Which came first, the chicken or the egg?' In this case, for chicken read 'Circle' and for 'Egg' read 'Plasma Vortex'. Professor Ohtsuki developed a nice little gadget which demonstrated that an electrically-charged vortex *could* produce circles in dust. Furthermore, these circles were often *ringed* - just like those seen in the cornfields. But which came first ? Did Professor Ohtsuki invent his vortex-making machine in response to the *need* to produce some sort of proof that a vortex was the circle-maker ? Of course he did. Only because everyone *assumed* that the vortex was real and therefore its existence was taken for granted.

So, what about this elusive vortex ? It's a fact that spinning winds like tornados do have an electrically-charged funnel. And of course a meteorologist like Dr Meaden, himself a renowned authority on tornados, would look towards his own discipline to explain why these circles were being formed in crops. Various vague reports of 'lights' and 'humming' sounds said to accompany circles forming only served to provide the necessary impetus for a theory to be formed.

It was a bit like the Emperor's New Clothes, though; we believed that the Plasma Vortex was forming the circles, even though the 'evidence' left us naked as the day we were born.

Theories need proof to become fact. Therefore, if the Plasma Vortex exists under the conditions claimed for its creation, we should be able to go out 'Vortex spotting' whenever the weather conditions are right. Even if we don't see a vortex, these same conditions, a combination of weather and locations plus crop, should produce a circle. But they don't.

Over the last few years I've kept a watch on places which, given the correct theory, should produce the simplest of crop circles. But nothing's happened. The weather hasn't changed that dramatically, nor have the fields and the hills. However, *something* has :

The Climate.

No, not the Climate as in weather, but the climate surrounding the circles business. The hysteria, media interest and societies have all faded away to an occasional gentle breeze.

No more the storm (dare I say Vortex) of debate which sucked many of us in, only to throw us down again miles from where we started. The once numerous articles in magazines of all persuasions; the prolific 'definitive' theories in scientific journals: all have blown over. Even *The Cropwatcher* now fills its pages not with the latest debate on crop field patterns or hoaxers, but on UFO studies. *The Journal of Meteorology*, in whose hallowed pages scientists and weather-men once advanced their own particular theories for the formation of the crop circles, doesn't even mention flattened corn any more.

Where is the Plasma Vortex in all this, now ? Faded away, blown over, replaced by a warm front. What I'm saying is this : conventional science needed to believe that the circles, lights and sounds could be explained in a scientific way : *ergo* the Plasma Vortex. Several years on, the theory can no longer hold water. If it did, we'd still be getting simple circles in places judged to be ideal for the vortex, but we're not.

Would the last person to leave the laboratory please turn out the lights ?

Peter Rendall is a member of the Circles Effect Research Society, which is affiliated with the Tornado and Storm Research Organisation.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Roswell Autopsy Film

Paul Fuller has produced a 50 page A4 "timeline" summarising over 650 key events in this recent controversy. Readers who want a copy of this document should send a cheque for £ 2.50 made payable to 'Paul Fuller' to the Subscriptions address on page 2. No need to send a S.A.E.

As reported by James Easton (see *Fortean Times*, 97, page 41) someone claiming to be the alien autopsy cameraman has finally given a video interview, sometime in July 1996. The interview was self

No one seems to have considered that what Mr Ellis saw was an astronomical mirage. His 'reconstruction' closely resembles one and the lack of movement and sound are consistent. At the time, Sirius, the brightest star in the sky was low in the SSW, 11.5° above the horizon on an azimuth of 217°. Now, while this is not SSE, there could be a mistake in azimuth of a few degrees or an inversion can have shifted the image laterally. Sirius is a type A1 star, whose colour is white to blue-white. It can therefore easily have been the cause of the mirage, showing a 'vivid "electric blue" light.

It may be objected that 'cloudy skies' precludes sight of Sirius. Was it completely overcast? Mr Ellis gave no sky data. The mirage can have been caused by the occluded front moving in from the west.

Naturally a mirage does not make marks on the ground. Experience tells me that there will be an independent cause of the mark and that it may have existed before the sighting.

At least this explanation should be considered alongside others.

Yours faithfully
Steuart Campbell,
Edinburgh

Editor's Note : To settle the issue once and for all we invite offers from any *New UFOlogist* readers located in the Cumbria area to visit Low Woodside Farm. You will need to take some photographs, a couple of measurements and some compass readings. Volunteers please contact the Editorial Address on page 2 !

Dear Sir,

Browsing through issue 2 of *The New UFOlogist* I read the "Stonehenge Event" by Albert Budden. In his article Budden states that the witnesses experienced their close encounter "...On or around 18th November 1990 at about 8.30....." and later, that the witnesses saw "...a bright full moon."

No way !...The nearest Full Moons were on November 2nd or December 2nd, 1990.

As the 18th November was a Sunday (which would line up with the fact that the couple were travelling

back from a visit) then the nearest Sunday on which there was a 'Full Moon' was December 2nd.

I expect that was spotted long ago !

Victor J. Kean, Berlin, Germany.

Dear Sir,

I wonder how many readers picked up on the discrepancies between Jayne MacNish's statement on the white horse incident and that of her husband, BBC producer John MacNish (see *The Westbury White Horse Incident*, *The New UFOlogist*, issue 5, page 12-14) ?

Jayne MacNish's statement, which Paul Fuller solicited from Jayne just before issue 5 went to press, and which appeared as a last minute addendum to my piece, was in the form of a disclaimer, denying (implicitly or explicitly) that her husband had ever investigated the incident or even that he had spoken to the police about it.

This is completely at odds with the account given by John MacNish in 1991 which I cited in my article. This was no second or third hand account or half-remembered conversation with MacNish. It was a transcription by me of an audio tape recording of MacNish describing the events of that weekend. It was transcribed verbatim right down to the 'ums' and 'ahs'. In it MacNish details the information *given to him by the police*, the result of the autopsy, what was in the official police report, etc.

Come on MacNish, let's have it from the horse's mouth ! Did you or did you not phone the police that weekend ? Did they or did they not discuss with you what was in the official police report, inform you of the result of the autopsy etc. ? Would a copy of a tape of you describing these events jog your memory?

Joe Dormer, Blackpool, England.

Dear Sir,

By some wonderful synchronicity, the departure of Albert Budden from TNU's editorial panel has coincided with an overwhelming surge of intelligent thought in the magazine. Particularly refreshing is Joe Dormer's work on the "Westbury White Horse Mutilation". This is real research, logically

recorded and shows an elderly man answering questions sent to him by Bob Kiviat, producer of the Fox TV documentary *Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction*. The video taped interview was delivered to Kiviat in a hotel in New York City by a second person claiming to be the camera-man's son. For some reason the camera-man accidentally revealed his face, which is why the interview has yet to be screened in the US or Britain. In December a section of this interview was shown on Japanese TV and stills showing the alleged camera-man were soon uploaded onto various internet newsgroups. So far the camera-man has yet to be identified.

Research Appeal

The Irish UFO and Paranormal Research Association are currently undertaking research into UFO reports made by airline pilots from 1947 to the present day. The information required includes the name of the pilot and airline, the type of aircraft and number of passengers involved, the date/time of the sighting, whether or not the UFO appeared on radar, what the weather conditions were and whether or not the pilot made an official report to his superiors. If you have details of such sightings - even if they are only news cuttings - please could you forward them to The IUFOFRA Information Network at Box 3070, Whitehall, Dublin 9, IRELAND.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

While it is flattering to be referred to so many times (in issue 5), I take exception to many of the comments.

Joe Dormer appears to have lost control of his sense of humour. He accuses me of being big-headed because I am 'trying to prove' that Alan Godfrey's UFO was a mirage of Venus which 'interfered with the car's electrical system, [and] left a circular patch in the road'. In fact there is no good evidence that whatever Godfrey saw did either or these things. And I'm not trying to 'prove' anything; I merely offer an explanation for what he saw.

Then Dormer makes fun of (and exaggerates) the fact that, at one time, I suggested that ball lightning (a major preoccupation of your journal at the present

time) could explain **some** UFO reports. Does Dormer regard the ability to change one's mind an intellectual defect? Most ufologists are in want of such a change. In fact I have advocated a mirage hypothesis longer than I advocated a BL hypothesis.

Dormer also wants to make fun of my explanation for the holes in windows. Has he nothing better to do? When did *he* explain such holes, or even a UFO report? When did he actually investigate anything and when was it published in a prestigious journal?

Ralph Noyes, who damns me with faint praise and apologizes for extending the mirage hypothesis into ill-considered psychic dimensions, recommends John Harney's review of my book. I would not! Harney made several major errors and evidently considered himself an expert on mirages. He appears to have concluded that because he could not accept the mirage hypotheses, it could not be a valid explanation. If Noyes is unaware of other, more sympathetic, reviews, then he ought to be.

Yours faithfully
Steuart Campbell,
Edinburgh

Editorial Comment : Readers may be interested to learn that *The Journal of Meteorology* (Vol 22, No 216, February 1997) has published an extensive article by Dr. D.J. Turner titled "The Interaction of Ball Lightning with Glass Window Panes". Dr. Turner's article examines the Edinburgh University case referred to by Steuart in the letters section of *The New UFOlogist*, issue 5, along with a similar case from Stockholm (1944) and a third case from Uppsala (1994). Turner has another article "Reproducibility in the formation of lightning balls" in *The Journal of Meteorology*, Vol 21, No 214 (December 1996). *The Journal of Meteorology* can be obtained from QED House, Frome Road, Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire, BA15 1LD.

Dear Sir,

The article about the Low Woodside (Penrith) circle and UFO is quite interesting and well researched (up to a point). Paul Fuller was wise to observe that 'not all the evidence points towards a meteorological explanation' and that 'the lack of acoustics may be because Robert Ellis was quite some way from the light phenomenon when he saw it'. Indeed, he could have been 9 light years away!

conducted, and when I referred to a "non-expert" report, I meant a report not made by a veterinary surgeon, whose opinion on the causes of a horse's death I'd instinctively trust best.

What is abundantly apparent, whatever the truth of the report made by the alleged witnesses, is that Mr Budden's assertions that 'A lightning strike on the horse at the summit had thrown up a number of small ball-lightning centres which had then expended their electro-thermal energies through the horse as described, cauterising off the ear and sex organ' were made without a shred of supporting evidence. Perhaps readers would like to consider this wild assumption when assessing the validity of all of Albert's others.

Kevin McClure, Leeds, Yorkshire.

CALENDER

The LAPIS International UFO Conference

Date : 15/16th November 1997

Venue : The Lowther Pavillion, Lytham near Blackpool

Speakers include :

Bill Holden, Dr Brian O'Leary,
Matthew Williams

Contact: Paulette (01253) 391704 or
Sam (01253) 691301

Astronomical Data

June

Mercury is a morning 'star' for most of this month. It reaches superior conjunction (i.e. is on the far side of the sun) on 25th, after which it becomes an evening star. Mercury is not visible mid-summer when the ecliptic is only slightly inclined to the horizon.

Venus is only just visible low on the horizon in the evening sky.

Mars is in the constellation of Virgo moving south-eastwards. It is at magnitude 0.6 and fading.

Jupiter is at -2.7 magnitude and is the brightest star in the night sky. It goes retrograde on 10th, moving westward relative to the fixed stars.

Saturn is in Pisces, rising in the morning twilight at the beginning of the month and around midnight by 30th.

Uranus is in Capricorn and rises at about 11.30 p.m. early in the month.

Neptune is in Sagittarius, rising at about 9 pm by the end of the month. This planet is never visible to the naked eye.

The Moon is to the south of Venus on 6th; near Mars on 13th; near Jupiter on 24th; and very close to Saturn on 1st. Full moon is on 20th.

July

Mercury continues to be an evening star throughout this month, setting too close to the sun to be visible in the twilight.

Venus can still be seen in the evening, low down on the north-western horizon.

Mars will be passing by Spica, the brightest star in Virgo, at the end of the month. They are of magnitude 1.0 and 1.2 respectively but Mars is easily identifiable by its reddish colour. The planet passes into Libra late in the month.

Jupiter rises in the east as the sun disappears over the western horizon. It is visible all night.

Saturn rises at 10 p.m. by the end of the month.

Uranus is at opposition on 29th and therefore due south at midnight.

Neptune is at opposition on 21st, and therefore visible (through a telescope) throughout the hours of darkness.

The Moon is to the south of Venus on 7th; to the north of Mars on 11th; to the north of Jupiter on 21st; and near Saturn on 25th. Full moon is on 20th.